

# THE LITTLE CITIZEN

M. E. WALLER







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*The Little Citizen*













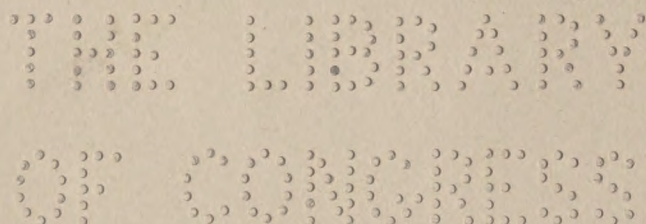
*"HE RUSHED TO THE ROAD WITH HIS LANTERN HELD HIGH ABOVE HIS HEAD."  
(See page 312.)*



# THE LITTLE CITIZEN

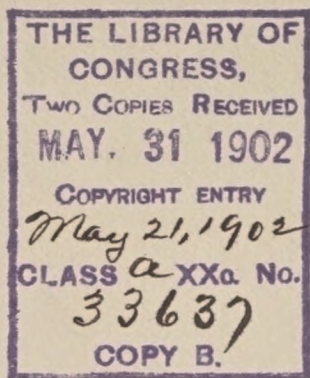
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By M. E. WALLER

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TO  
*Rex and Ned,*  
MY BOY FRIENDS  
AND BEST CRITICS

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# CONTENTS

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CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	"MY-ALL-ALONE" . . . . .	11
II.	JACOB FOSS . . . . .	21
III.	NANCE . . . . .	41
IV.	THE CIRCUS IN THE BACK PASTURE . . . . .	57
V.	THE LAST REHEARSAL . . . . .	78
VI.	BLACK BEAR CAVE . . . . .	97
VII.	FLIGHT . . . . .	106
VIII.	THE CIRCUS IN THE BOWERY . . . . .	125
IX.	THE FREEBOOTERS . . . . .	140
X.	JOHN ANSTEY . . . . .	154
XI.	THE NEW BOARDER . . . . .	162
XII.	THE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE . . . . .	185
XIII.	THE VERDICT OF THE JURY . . . . .	200
XIV.	THE 10.30 MAIL . . . . .	209
XV.	IN THE ROOST . . . . .	217
XVI.	IN CAMP . . . . .	234
XVII.	THE STILL HUNT . . . . .	255
XVIII.	SUMMER PLANS . . . . .	270
XIX.	THE HUSKING . . . . .	283
XX.	A NOVEMBER NIGHT . . . . .	296
XXI.	THE LITTLE CITIZEN . . . . .	315







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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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	PAGE	
<i>"He rushed to the road with his lantern held high above his head"</i>		Frontispiece ✓
<i>"Miffins threw up his straw hat . . . in ecstasy of delight"</i>	92	✓
<i>"He worked his way down, holding tightly by the rope"</i>	190	✓
<i>"Amid excited talk and shouts of victory"</i>	268	✓







# *The Little Citizen*

## CHAPTER I.

### *My-All-Alone*

“HI, there! Spikes!”

A drawn, old-young face lifted itself from a pillow in the children's ward in Bellevue Hospital, and a claw-like hand flapped frantically, if somewhat feebly, above the counterpane.

“Hi! Spikes! Bully fer yer! Comin' 'long-side? Did yer git a leg on yer?”

There was no answer as the men brought the stretcher alongside the hospital cot, and Miffins subsided; only the deep-set gray eyes watched, ferret-like, every movement of the attendants.

He had grown familiar with all the detail of hospital work in the last three months; so familiar, that he criticised in a not too subdued voice the exertions of a “freshie” — so he had dubbed the new nurses in training — to place the hot-water bags aright.



"Look a here, freshie, his feet ain't *there*; yer got 'em too low. Spikes is shorter'n me. Huh! It's a-leakin'! Spikes's pegs don't want no washin', I tell yer. P'r'aps he ain't got 'em to wash! Lemme see."

He squirmed about, trying ineffectually to raise himself on his elbow, but sank back exhausted with the effort.

"Well, Miffins, how are you this morning?" The visiting surgeon bent over the cot, and smiled cheerily into the queer, drawn face.

"Bloomin'. Wot's got Spikes?"

"The 'grip' again; — got him where it got you, only it didn't let go this time."

"Got'er lose one'r his pegs?"

"Yes."

"Huh! Wuz he bridgin'?"

"Yes, — tried your leap from the 'grip' of one train to the 'trailer' of another, poor fellow."

"Can't do as much as I can, can he?"

"No, — and yes."

"Wot yer givin' us?"

"I mean he'll have a wooden leg, and can stump it; while you —"

"Wot 'bout me?"

"Well, Miffins, you'll have to do a good deal of sitting around for a few years. You can't splice a twisted thigh as you can a rope and use it much, you know."



"No jollyin'?"

"I'm telling you truly; and I thought, Miffins, I'd better tell you now, that you might have time to think about it before you're discharged."

"Yer mean they're goin' ter ship me?"

"Yes, you'll be able to go in four weeks."

"Go where?"

The heart of the strong man quivered at the boy's question. *Where* should he go, this news-boy waif, known only as Miffins, whose recklessness had thrown him beneath the cable-car, and crippled him for life? But the surgeon's voice was steadily cheery as he replied:

"I've been thinking about that, Miffins, and I am going to send a friend of mine to you this afternoon. She'll talk it over with you."

"I'd cut, only I can't," was Miffins's dogged reply. "I ain't goin' ter no Newsboys' Home — not if I knows it."

The surgeon laughed. "I don't think she will ask you to, Miffins, but if you look at her that way, *she* will 'cut.'"

Miffins grinned. He could appreciate a bit of fun.

"Wot time's she comin'?"

"About four. Good-by."

Miffins held out his apology for a hand. "Give us yer flipper. I like the feel of it."

The little man and the great man shook hands.



Then Miffins fell to thinking. That is, he stared at the hospital windows until the light looked black, and then gazed at the ceiling for the pastime of seeing the huge squares reproduce themselves there for a moment. That was queer, but not so queer as his other pleasure, which was, when his eyes were weakened with the light, to shut them and watch the strange play of purple and green and yellow that went on beneath his closed lids. Red spots, that swelled, so it seemed to him, to the size of toy balloons, disappeared in a whirl of purple, always running down-hill toward his left ear. Curious flecks of bright yellow, rayed about like the headlight of an engine in a foggy night, rushed across the closed lids and vanished — always down-hill — toward his left ear. During the months of pain, he had amused himself by the hour watching this strange play of light.

“Sittin’ ’round,” he muttered, “wot’ll I do sittin’ ’round!” He chuckled. The humor of the situation struck him, that he, Miffins, who had been on his feet all his life, should spend even a part of it “sittin’ ’round.” Then he slept.

That afternoon the surgeon’s friend, a young woman who figured as a member of various charitable organizations, among them “The Society for Providing Country Homes for Waifs,” sat by the cot, and told Miffins of the life that was



open to him in the country. She laid it before him in terms that, in part, were as Greek to Miffins; and Miffins listened because she was pretty and he liked her voice. What he gathered from that visit he made plain to the surgeon the next morning as follows:

“She said as how I’d have no pal, ’coz there ain’t no sech kids as me up there. No cock-fights —’thout there was a barnyard one—wot’s that?”

The surgeon explained, and Miffins’s eyes sparkled.

“No cops and no scabbies — nothin’ but old duffers like them wot gives yer the free bite and turkey at the Christmas shindy down ter the Home; ’n’ yer can swipe apples right ’long on the street; ’n’ she gives yer a free ride up there, sittin’ *inside*, yer mind. I’ll go,” said Miffins, suddenly, and the surgeon wondered at the apparent willingness with which he made up his mind to leave the city — this waif of the New York streets, who, for mother’s milk, had been brought up on the rush and roar of the metropolitan thoroughfares.

But Miffins said to himself: “’N’ if I want ter cut, I’ll cut!”

Four weeks from that day, a morning train for the East, moving out of the Grand Central Station, bore a small boy of thirteen, whose pale face and shrunken, twisted body contrasted pain-



fully with the crimson upholstered seats. Beside him were two crutches, as yet unused, and in his hand he clutched a four-quart, brown paper bag, containing six apples, four bananas, a half-dozen ham sandwiches, two sticks of chewing-gum, one pint of peanuts, and four buttered muffins.

A card, some three inches square, was sewed on his blouse, and announced:

“To all whom it may concern. The wearer, Miffins, discharged this first day of July, eighteen hundred and ninety—, from Bellevue Hospital, New York, is consigned by the New York Society for Providing Country Homes for Waifs, to Jacob Foss of Hurdyville, Chittenden County, Vermont, via N. Y., N. H., & H.; C. R. V.; C. V. R. R., due at nearest railway station, Barnet, at 6 P. M. Conductors please note change of cars.

“Per order, JAMES BLANK,  
“*Secretary of Society for Providing  
Country Homes for Waifs.*”

The train was an hour late. A hot-box and a hot July day kept company, and even the train-boys, the candy, smelling-salts, popcorn, and magazine venders were almost silenced by the heat and dust.

All through that stifling summer day Miffins



sat by the open window, unmindful of the soot and cinders, but alive to all else that passed without and within.

"Guess they don't know it's me," he said to himself as he looked on his spoils, preparatory to putting them into the empty, brown paper bag.

"Zooks! if this comes 'er sittin' 'round, I'd better keep on sittin'." He chuckled as he counted over his silver bits.

Passengers from the drawing-room car just ahead had looked pityingly upon the crippled boy as they passed through the aisle, and more than one, returning, had pressed a bit of silver into his hand. Miffins winked knowingly at one and another, but was inwardly amazed at getting "tips" for nothing.

"Three shiners, two spots, two no-goes, and a cracker;" which, interpreted, meant three quarters, two ten-cent pieces, two half-dollars, and a dollar.

These he put into his pocket. Into the bag there went two apples and some cookies, gifts from an old woman who had called him "sonny;" a large popcorn-ball trickling with molasses, contributed by a train-boy; a handful of sticky spruce gum, which a country lad had dislodged with great difficulty from the pockets of his rustic trousers; an automatic top that a little palace-car gentleman, in white duck



and a sailor-hat, urged him to accept, saying he could get plenty more at home; two white cotton handkerchiefs, with which an elderly maiden had wished to wipe his cinder-and-soot-begrimed face, but which, upon his decided refusal to comply with her request, she had slipped into his blouse, with the remark, "Mebbe you'll want to clean up before you see your folks." At which Miffins grinned, saying nothing, not even a word of thanks.

Last, but not least, he stowed away two baby rabbits, white as wool, which a little girl had given him late in the afternoon. The mother had come with the child to Miffins's seat.

"My little girl wants to give you her rabbits. She has more at home, and was taking them to her cousin Jimmy, but she says she would rather you had them, if you would like them. She can send Jimmy two others; she has six at home."

Miffins looked up in amazement at the sweet-voiced woman, and down at the bit of a girl, whose curly head came just above the arm of the seat, and whose little hands were full of something downy-white and pink. She dropped the soft balls into his lap.

"I'm sowwy for 'oo. Tan't 'oo wun?" she said. Then, seized with sudden shyness, she hid her face in the folds of her mother's dress, and was led away.



The brown paper bag was comfortably full; still there was one more treasure which it could not hold.

The conductor had told the baggage-master of his crippled charge in the day-coach, and, when the hot-box delayed the train an hour at one of the way stations, a man came in for a look at the "waif."

"Well, little chap, you look as if you needed some air," he said. "Guess we'll take a constitutional;" and with that, he lifted Miffins as easily as if he had been a dress-suit case, and carried him out upon the shaded platform of the station. Here he walked up and down with him in his arms for a quarter of an hour, and then, having made him known to the station-agent, laid him down upon a pile of burlap, which he had placed in the shade of a fine maple that grew near the track.

It was a pleasant change from the overheated car, and Miffins, stretched at length, tired out with the long journey and the continual ache in his hip and back, fell asleep.

Something soft, dragging over his face, awakened him. He put up his hand, and lo! a few weeks old puppy, a baby collie, tawny-coated, uncertain-eyed, unsteady on his pudgy legs.

"Huh!" Miffins tried to sit up, but failed. "He's a peach. Lemme feel!"

The station-master righted the puppy, that had



rolled over on his back in consequence of Miffins's sudden movement, and placed him in the boy's arms.

"He's yours to keep, Miffins. I've got a boy at home who raises 'em, and sells 'em for five dollars apiece down your way. He'll fetch and carry for you when he's a little older, and I guess you'll need it more'n my boy."

Miffins's surprise made him dumb.

"Don't want no thanks; you're more'n welcome. Come, it's time you was inside."

And now Miffins took his sleepy treasure in his arms, for the brakeman had called, "Barnet, Barnet." The train thundered over a bridge, rushed around a sharp curve, slackened speed, and drew to a two minutes' halt, during which Miffins and the puppy, the crutches and brown paper bag were somehow gathered up into the baggage-master's capacious embrace, and gently deposited on an empty truck on the platform.



## CHAPTER II.

*Jacob Foss*

IT was seven o'clock, and Jacob Foss had waited an hour already at the station.

"I come down fer feed, and ter git a boy from New York," he explained to the station-agent.

"They call 'em waifs. Marthy, she's ben set on hevin' one fer nigh four years. I ain't nothin' agin it ez I know on, but I don't hanker arter it ez she does; fer, arter all, I tell her it's 'sperimentin' with what yer don't know nothin' 'bout.

"'Tain't like own folks, this takin' a child out er that great Babel — kinder grab-bag business anyway — but Marthy's hed her way this time, 'n' I ain't goin' to go agin her."

"What's his name?"

"Miffins. Sorter heathenish, ain't it? I guess Marthy'll change it."

"He'll be good help fer ye, mebbe."

"O Lord, no! He ain't no help. Marthy



wuz kinder skeered to take a right healthy chap, fer fear he'd git the neighbors' children inter mischief. P'r'aps he'd run away. I've hearn of sech doin's. Dretful oneasy critters. Whoa, Ethan!"

He flicked a fly from the horse's ear.

"Marthy she's cute; got good jedgment, too. She wrote ter the s'ciety ter send her a cripple, coz, says she, 'Ef he's a cripple, he can't run away, no more'n he can git 'round to git other children inter mischief' — The train's er comin'. Stan' still, Ethan; whoa there, no gim-cracks, 'thout yer want ter feel this lash."

"Jerusalem!" he muttered, as he saw the baggage-master place his armful of helplessness carefully on the truck.

"Je-ru—" his exclamation ended in a long whistle, which encouraged Ethan to snort and rear as the train steamed away, and gave Jacob Foss all he could well attend to for the next five minutes.

When the horse had ceased his gymnastics, Jacob called over to Miffins, who had watched the fun from the platform:

"I'll be back in five minutes. Yer jest stay whar yer be till I git this durned critter quiet," and he drove off and disappeared around a turn of the road.

"Wot's the old duffer er givin' me, tellin' me to stay here, when he knows I can't leg it?"



Miffins demanded of the ticket-agent, who came out to look at him after locking the station door.

"Oh, he don't mean nothin'. Guess he warn't expectin' jest sech ez you."

"He warn't, warn't he?" mimicked Miffins, with a growl, for he was tired and cross, and to relieve himself, shook his fist at the turn of the road when he saw the farm-wagon reappearing. "Yer bet yer life, he don't say that ter me widout my gittin' even wid 'im."

Jacob, having hitched Ethan, came up to the truck and stared at Miffins.

Miffins took him in with one glance of his ferret-like eyes.

"Hello, old Hayseed."

Jacob said nothing.

"Hello, I say; don't yer look too long, er yer eyes'll drop out uv yer head."

"Sho!" said Jacob, and drew the back of his hand across his eyes. "It *does* make 'em water ter look at ye; that's a fact." The puppy set up a dismal wail, for he was tired and hungry.

"Sho!" the man repeated, this time under his breath, and, taking the puppy up by the nape of his neck, he looked him over with an appreciative eye.

Miffins felt he had met his match, and watched him in silence, as he laid hold of the truck, and pushed it carefully across the platform.

"Wal, sonny, guess we'd better be gittin'



'long. It's ben a scorcher, but the nights air mighty sharp in these parts, 'n' the dew's er fallin'. The pup'll hev ter wait fer his supper. Be yer hungry?"

"No," said Miffins, "I've got grub 'nough here." He showed his bag.

"Wal, then, in with ye. Ye've ben settin' round all day, and the nex' six mile'll be easier ef ye stretch right out on this 'ere buffalo-robe. I've put a good shake-down er hay under it, and the wagon hez springs."

He lifted Miffins as carefully as he would handle a cracked egg, and laid him down on the robe.

"I take it ye ain't hungry jest now, 'n' if ye want ter sleep, jest sleep. I'll look out fer the pup" — he reached over for the collie — "he'll make 'n A No. 1 dog fer tending sheep arter he's cut his wisdom teeth. What's his name?"

"Ain't got any ez I knows on," said Miffins, who began to think the "old hayseed" knew a thing or two.

"Wal, how ye're er goin' ter bring him up ef he hain't no name? He ain't er goin' to run fer sheep ef he hain't no name."

"Wot's sheep?" said Miffins.

"What's sheep, sonny? Umph — I allus knowed a city chap wuz durned ign'rant, but



I didn't think he wuz er reg'lar muttonhead. Dunno what a sheep is? Lord! I must tell Marthy thet. Wal, sonny, it's a critter ez'll clothe yer, or feed yer, or put money in the bank fer yer, jest ez ye look at it. I'll show yer some a piece up. Git erlong, Eth!

"Here, yer fidget, guess thet's ez good er name ez any fer yer; yer set here 'longside er me, 'n' sleep, too, ef yer want ter."

He lifted his old straw hat, and took out a faded bandanna from the crown. With this, he made the sleepy puppy fast to the board seat, and so ensured him against accident.

"Han' me yer feed, sonny, 'n' I'll put it down here in the corner, so 'twon't go jolting out over thank-yer-marms."

Miffins handed up the brown paper bag.

Jacob took it, and the rabbits squirmed under his firm hold.

"Je-ru! What in thunder hev yer got here?"

The farmer opened the bag, and found the baby rabbits trying to free themselves from spruce-gum, seed-cakes, handkerchiefs, and apples.

"Two more critters ez needs sleep! Wonder what Marthy'll say! Any more live stock, sonny?"

Miffins grinned.

"Wal, ef ye're got no more s'prise parties,



guess ye'd all four better settle down 'n' go ter sleep. We've got a purty steep pull before us."

The sun was low, in fact had set behind the higher hills, leaving the winding river road in shadow. Robins, thrushes, and bobolinks made the darkening woods ring with their even-songs. The East Branch ran beside the highway, and added its gurgle to the twilight sounds.

Miffins was worn out, and fell asleep during the first quarter of a mile.

The puppy snuggled up to Jacob's side and did likewise. The rabbits, having been placed in the capacious pocket of the farmer's old great-coat, had ceased to squirm, and nestled comfortably in what, doubtless, they mistook for a burrow.

Jacob looked around with a satisfied smile. "Wal," he said to himself, "guess, fer a spell, it'll be all quiet on the Potomac," and therewith he chuckled, for he was a Grand Army man, and knew whereof he spoke.

For five miles he drove on with slack rein, pondering what Marthy would say to all these additions to her household. Only once he stopped, to water the horse before turning up the hill road, a long pull and a hard pull, with frequent waits on the water-bars for Ethan to recover his wind.



Ethan knew every foot of the road, both in summer heat and winter snows, and during his comfortable life of fourteen years, he had never had occasion to shy at unwonted sights on the quiet, unfrequented hill road.

But to-day the unexpected happened.

Jacob, lost in thought, was leaning over the low board that served for a dasher, his elbows resting on his knees, his old straw hat pushed back from his forehead that he might feel what little breeze there was. Suddenly Ethan stopped, and shied with such prompt energy that the farmer was almost unseated, and the drowsy puppy was thrown out over the wheel, and hung by the bandanna, too thoroughly choked by the sudden tightening of the band about his neck to utter a sound.

“Whoa-a-a! What in thun— whoa-a! Stan’ still, I tell yer. What fool thing ails yer, Eth!”

Ethan stood still, but snorted frantically.

The farmer leaned over and rescued the strangling puppy.

The setting sun shone full upon a spot of flaming red among the bushes on the side of the road to the left, and the bushes and brakes were in a strange state of agitation.

To his equine imagination, Ethan had seen “spooks,” and the farmer himself looked little less than dazed, as the bushes opened and an



Italian organ-grinder, with an organ on his back and a monkey on his shoulder, stepped out into the road, and, cap in hand, saluted the farmer.

The sudden lurch of the cart and Jacob's vociferous shouts had roused Miffins, and, raising himself on his elbow, he looked about him, bewildered to recognize a Dago on a Vermont hilltop. He took in the situation at a glance, and, beginning to scent some fun, lay low again to witness it.

The Italian was a handsome fellow, smooth-faced and merry-eyed, with a flashing smile and a grace of gesture that at once won Jacob Foss.

And the monkey! He ducked his head, and doffed his apology for a cap. He patted his master's head. He held out his tiny, nervous hand to Jacob. Suddenly he leaped from the Italian's shoulder to the top of the organ; then, after turning a somersault, he drew a small pipe from his ragged blouse and placed it between his teeth; finally he pulled a basswood leaf from an overhanging branch, and, squatting on his haunches, proceeded to fan himself languidly, at the same time making faces alternately at Ethan and Jacob.

"Wal," said Jacob, "I dunno who yer be, but I like yer looks, an' the little chap does seem sorter wilted. But, durn me, ef I know what thet infernal machine o' yourn is!"



He jerked his whip-stock toward the organ. Checco comprehended the gesture at once, and pommelled Filippo's shoulder with reviving energy. His master, too, was sure he interpreted the man's pantomime, and, setting the organ firmly on the ground, struck up the "Anvil Chorus."

Ethan, the much-enduring, leaped wildly out of the road.

"Whoa-a-a-ah!" shouted the farmer. "Durn the critter," he muttered, plying the lash freely about the animal's loins.

"Whoa, I say! He ain't used ter these modern gimcracks." He threw this in as an apologetic aside to Filippo, who had hoisted himself and his silenced instrument out of the vicinity of the various curves the horse's hoofs were performing in mid-air.

With some coaxing and more lash-tickling, Ethan was brought again into stable equilibrium. His quivering body, however, still described a curve on the off side, as he eyed askance the trio on the bank. From time to time, he snorted his indignation.

Jacob got down from his seat, and, taking the horse by the bridle, pulled him (not without much planting of fore feet, however) across the road to the spot where the scarlet-panelled front of the organ gleamed like a witch's cloak among the bushes.



"Here, hold onter this critter, will yer, while I heft the music-box."

Filippo took the horse by the bridle, but gingerly, while Checco gyrated aimlessly from his master's shoulder to the organ, and from the organ to the ground.

"Sho! it's good seven stun," he said, setting down the instrument with an increased respect of manner. Then, turning to Filippo, he said, kindly:

"Load up, Black Eyes, yer've got more brawn'n I'd give yer credit fur, ef yer *dew* wear ear-jewels." He eyed the gold half-moon earrings with evident distrust.

"I guess we'll make Eth pay the fiddler this time. He hain't never backed with me yit, and I like yer tune. Come, git in, or I sha'n't be ter home in time ter milk, and Marthy'll fidgit."

This lengthy speech was accompanied by such intelligible pantomime that Filippo at once proceeded to hoist his organ into the cart.

Of all this, Miffins was an interested spectator.

"Hi, there! yer Dago, look out fer my pegs, and set yer box so I kin see out."

Filippo smiled, and looked down pityingly on the small white face on the buffalo-robe. He sat down on the tail of the cart, with his back to the organ to steady it, and Jacob placed the "little chap," as he continued to call the monkey,



on the seat beside the puppy. This arrangement was not satisfactory; for, before the wagon could start, a prolonged wail from the puppy, followed by a sharp yelp, proved that his city neighbor had tweaked his budding tail. There-upon Miffins dealt the monkey a weak blow on the head, which knocked the dilapidated cap over one ear, and Checco, showing his teeth, broke into such a fury of chattering rage that Filippo rated him soundly in his choicest Italian, and, hitting him a clip with a small scourge, reduced him to grumbling silence. Jacob laughed aloud at this by-play, and, diving into his various pockets, brought out a piece of maple-sugar, which he gave to the monkey, at the same time removing him to the other side of the seat, where the little fellow forgot his rage in munching the sugar, and continued to fan himself with a contented air which charmed Jacob.

"Guess there'll be music in the air ter-night up ter the old house," he murmured to himself. "Things'll hum with this load of live stock! Wonder what Marthy'll say!" But aloud, he said, suddenly turning to Filippo, and pointing ahead to a steep rise, while his face wrinkled with visible pleasure:

"Now, churn ahead, Black Eyes, an' make it lively."

With his left arm, he described a circle in the air that plainly indicated his desire.



"Ef the critter *does* back, I'll fix him."

Bracing his feet against the low dasher, he swung his lash till it cut the air. "Hud-up!"

"Yez," responded Filippo to the supposed word of command.

Gaily the organ took up the interrupted phrase, and, as if the sledge-hammers of the chorus were falling in unison on his back, Ethan leaped forward, but only to pull powerfully up the hill.

"Thet's right! Take us right up on the bits, old boy, an' I guess ye'll find thet this team's got ter go ahead, 'n' not waste time shiftin' roun' inter gulleys," remarked the farmer, grimly rejoicing over his victory.

"Thet'll dew fer *now*," he said, when, having jerked the "Anvil Chorus" to its close, Filippo stopped to wipe the perspiration from his face and neck.

"'Tain't so easy running thet machine up-hill, and we don't want it ter run down jest yit, fer it's a-goin' ter tickle the wife's ear in a minute," he said, with a chuckle at his own wit.

He turned to look at Filippo, and, observing his perplexed face, — for the Italian had understood but few words of this speech, — he queried, almost wistfully:

"I take it ye're goin' ter put up with us ter-night, ain't yer?"

Filippo, still in doubt as to what the ques-



tion meant, was considering whether or no to smile on uncertainty.

"Ther'z plenty uv fodder fer all on ye," he went on; "I ken give yer a good 'nough place ter sleep in. Ef yeou ain't hungry, mebbe the little chap is."

Filippo's captivating smile came out from its eclipse. He laid his hand on his heart to show his gratitude, and then on his stomach to indicate his desire, and answered, sweetly:

"I vill zleep in zee barn, zaire, me ant Checco, if you be so good."

Hearing his name, Checco arose, cap in hand, to pay his respects, but a sudden lurch over a "thank-you-marm" pitched him over the low dasher, where he clung desperately to Ethan's tail, undaunted by the forcible left-legger that long-suffering animal immediately let fly.

"Durn ye," grumbled Jacob, rescuing the monkey with careful hand; then looking around to Filippo with an approving nod, he said:

"Thet's right, talk ahead, Black Eyes. I wuz feared yer wuz one uv them dumb heads, ez uses their ten fingers fer one tongue."

"Yez, zaire," responded Filippo only too willingly. "Me and Checco iz haf holy-day in zis bella lant."

"H'm! Hud-up, Eth. Job's roaster! But the feller's jargon beats me," he ejaculated under his breath.



Possibly a like thought was in Filippo's mind, but he refrained from giving it expression. Too much was at stake.

Evidently they were nearing some habitation, for Checco became greatly agitated by the appearance of fowls of all kinds. A sharp turn in the road brought them into the front yard. A woman, standing in the doorway of the long, low farmhouse, threw up both hands:

"Land sakes alive, father, what *hev* you got there?"

"Somethin' ter 'liven us up, Marthy, fer I thought we wuz gittin' a leetle mite rusty livin' alone. Here, mother, here's yer boy."

His voice grew husky as he spoke the word "mother," and the woman's eyes filled and overflowed as she followed the cart around to the back stoop, and watched her husband gather the homeless, crippled waif into his arms with strong, tender care. Then she spoke:

"Bring him right inter the little bedroom off the kitchen, father; I've got everything ready for him, an' you go and tend ter the rest on 'em."

Jacob placed Miffins in a huge armchair — a great-grandfather's chair with high back and protecting side-wings, that stood by the bed; then he went out to attend to his other guests.

Martha Foss's heart swelled within her. She



had not dreamed of such helplessness, and, remembering her own sturdy little lad, her one ten-year-old who had been laid away on the little hill behind the house some eighteen years ago, and on whose grave the June roses were even then in blossom, she stooped, and, taking the small, wasted, old-young face between her hands, kissed the white lips with all a mother's tenderness. Then she hurried away, for she heard Jacob calling to her.

Miffins never remembered to have been kissed before, and he obeyed his first impulse. With the back of his hand he rubbed his lips, and then puckered them for a long, low whistle.

"Zooks!" he said to himself, "this takes the cake," and his eyes brightened as he caught sight of the tea-table in the kitchen. He heard Martha come in, and Jacob following her, saying:

"Set the vittles right on, marm. The little chap's hungry, ter say nothin' of us bigger ones. Put on the best yer got, an' all on it, marm. 'Tain't every day we have a furriner on the hill." Then he called to Filippo:

"Now, we'll have a wash-up. Come inter the shed."

Footsore, weary, dirt-begrimed, Filippo and Checco entered the cool, roomy shed, filled with the fragrance of spruce and birch and well-seasoned pine.



Following the example of their host, they plunged their faces, necks and arms into the sparkling spring water that gurgled as waste from the kitchen spout into a broad, shallow wooden trough.

Then Filippo took Checco and retired with him behind a convenient wood-pile. Opening his pack, he took out his clean shirt, with its frilled front, and the gaily embroidered peasant-jacket — the toil of loving hands in his far-away home. These he put on and knotted his scarlet sash about his belt.

This apparel had been waiting for just such an occasion, when the best should be none too good to do honor to such courteous, ungrudging hospitality, that places prince and peasant on a level not to be reached except by those who are like-minded.

Checco, too, was transformed. From a haggard, woe-begone looking monkey in a suit of soiled corduroy, he blossomed into a little dandy, and flourished about in a gold-braided, blue velvet jacket, a scarlet silk vest, and frilled pantallettes beneath green corduroy knee-breeches. His beady eyes sparkled with delight, and, to give vent to his joy, he raced up the wood-pile and along the rafters to a convenient place for gymnastics, where he swung head downward, and performed many trapeze acts for his own benefit.



"He seems a'most human, father," said Martha, who had been watching the monkey's ablutions through a crack in the kitchen door. "I've sot on three plates, but, fer the life of me, I don't know what ter do fer that knowin' beast!"

"Put on another plate, marm, chiny, too. The best ain't a mite too good fer him, a-earnin' his little honest livin' like the rest uv us God's critters."

"It seems sorter heathenish, father, ter be a-breakin' bread with a dumb critter as goes part on twos and part on fours — but ef you say so, why, I don't mind."

She laughed under her breath, as she whispered, "He's the livin' image of old Deacon Simm's Hally after he'd come back East sick with the fever 'n' ager!"

"Come ter supper," called Jacob into the woodshed.

Miffins, cleansed from soot and cinders by Martha's roughened but tender hands, reclined in the great-grandfather's chair, and watched proceedings.

First, Martha tucked a napkin under his chin, then she brought in and set before him a small three-legged table. Disappearing for a minute into the depths of the pantry, she reappeared carrying a tin tray covered with a coarse white napkin, and placed it on the table.



"There," she said, with a satisfied air, "eat your supper, and all you want to. I sha'n't feel right 'bout ye till I see some flesh on your bones."

Miffins stared.

There was a glass pitcher of creamy milk, a plate piled with warm, flaky biscuit, a saucer of Vermont chipped beef, an old-fashioned blue china bowl heaped with wild strawberries, a pat of golden butter, and two squares of sponge cake equally yellow.

"I guess you needn't say grace ter-night, father," said Martha, as she and her guests sat down at the well-provided table. Checco was placed in a little, old high-chair, and behaved like the little gentleman he was. But although he did not grab at any of the dishes or spill the water from his tin cup, he gave vent to his satisfaction and astonishment by continually grinning, first at Martha, then at Jacob, and constantly elevating the callosities over his eyes where his eyebrows should have been, and rolling his beady eyes in all directions.

After supper, when Martha had "cleared up," and put Miffins into the middle of the white-sheeted, lavender-scented, downy feather bed, she and Jacob went out on the kitchen porch to listen to the music.

Filippo took his stand beneath the great elm, midway between the porch and the road. Checco ran up into the branches and ceased his chatter.



The moonlight, falling through the foliage of the elms and maples, checkered all the grass-plat with its white light, and a gentle breeze showered the petals of the full-blown June roses, climbing over the porch, upon the two heads beneath.

Then it was Filippo's turn to give pleasure. He played with his warm Italian heart, as well as his crank. One after another the tunes followed without interruption: "The Anvil Chorus," "Silver Threads among the Gold," "The Marseillaise," "'Way Down upon the Suwanee River," "Marching through Georgia" (Jacob leaped to his feet at that, but said never a word. His feet, however, kept time, tramp, tramp, — for years ago he had marched with Sherman to the sea); at last—and then Martha reached over, and laid her hand lovingly on Jacob's knotty, toil-hardened one—Filippo played "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

The tears rolled down Jacob's cheeks. It had been a great evening on the hill.

"Play that agin," he said, in a husky voice, and Filippo obeyed, while Jacob stole away to the little mound behind the house near the orchard, and stood there with his hands behind his back, looking down upon the roses faintly colored in the moonlight that transfigured all the place and, in Jacob's memory, the merry face of his ten-year-old boy.



Miffins, waif of the streets of New York, fell asleep to the tune of "'Way Down upon the Suwanee River," floating forth in the still night over the green hills of Vermont.



## CHAPTER III.

### *Nance*

THE next morning, Jacob Foss hung a stout canvas hammock between the supports of the kitchen porch, and placed Miffins in it.

“You lay there a spell,” he said, as he tested the ropes, “it’ll do yer good. I’m going to hitch up double an’ carry Black Eyes an’ the little chap a piece over the mountin. I sha’n’t be back ’fore noon. Guess yer won’t be lonesome ’fore then. I say, Marthy, put up a bite fer these two critters while I hitch up.”

As they drove out of the yard, Filippo with his hand on his heart, bowing his thanks to Martha Foss, Checco gyrating wildly from the organ to his master’s shoulder, his little cap tilted over his left ear, his tail straight with the excitement of the moment, Miffins wished with all his heart he were going, too. And when Martha had returned to her work somewhere in the back regions of the woodshed, Miffins left to himself, fell to thinking.



How still it was! Miffins turned uneasily in the hammock. He wondered how Spikes was coming on. He thought of his "pals," and the curbstone jokes while they waited for their evening papers. He would have given all his silver bits for the sound of an ambulance gong. And oh! for one sight of Engine No. 9, three horses abreast, dashing madly across the Square! If he might hear, just once, the toot-toot! If he might see the trailing smoke and the helmeted firemen and the hook-and-ladder "monkeys!" He longed for the free fight outside the saloon in the alley, when the boys formed a ring about the combatants, and jeered and hooted, or howled encouragement! And the treat all around at the corner grocery afterward, and the cigar-stumps, how good they were!

Miffins felt something queer in his throat, — one lump — two lumps. He swallowed hard, but it didn't seem to help much.

Without knowing it, Miffins was homesick; homesick for the city sights and sounds where he had never had a home. He forgot the sickening heat of the summer when he slept behind a pile of boards on one of the piers. He forgot the days when trade was poor, and one meal — a scant one at that: rotten bananas and stale buns — kept him moving for twenty-four hours. He recalled no longer the bitter winter nights



when he stood at the ferry chilled to the marrow with the driving sleet. He had ceased to remember the nights spent — huddled with his chums for warmth — in a straw-filled packing-box at the back of the Water Street warehouses. He forgot it all in his longing for what to him was his life.

The lumps multiplied. Miffins could swallow them no longer. He clutched his throat — then a cry, resonant, blood-curdling :

“Extraw! Extraw! Hall — about — the Bleeker Street — murdaw!”

Back from the surrounding hills came the triple echo, “Bleeker Street murdaw — murdaw — daw.”

Miffins drew a long breath. With that familiar cry the lumps had disappeared. He felt better. The puppy, rudely awakened from his after-breakfast nap on the edge of the porch, lost his balance, and fell over among Martha’s flower-pots, begonias, and fuchsias, yelping pitifully.

Martha came running from the woodshed, white and trembling.

“For the land sakes!” she cried, sitting down on the step, for her weak knees could support her no longer, “what was that?”

“Me,” said Miffins, somewhat sheepishly, for he had not meant to frighten any one.

“But what did you use that awful word for?”



It's give me a turn I sha'n't git over soon." She wiped the soap-suds from her arms with her apron, and drew a long breath. "What did you holler so for?"

"I dunno," said Miffins. "I didn't know I hollered like that; it sounds louder here. When me an' the kids are yellin' extraws we don't never think 'bout nothin' but a-yellin' loudest."

"I s'pose 'tis kinder different up here," said Martha. "I hain't never been in one o' them great Babels, but I've read about 'em. What do you do with yerself all day?"

Miffins told her, and the more he told the better he felt. He told her of the "shows" in the Bowery, and the circus and the parades; of run-away trolleys and the park police on their bicycles; of his own "pals" and the fun they had at the expense of the "cabbies;" of Fourth of July fireworks and street bands. But of his hunger and misery and cold he said never a word.

Martha listened intently, now and then interrupting the recital with a "Land sakes alive!" and narrator and listener were both deep in the details of a cock-fight in the cellar of a Water Street grocery when Jacob drove into the yard, with a cheery, "Dinner ready, marm?"

Martha threw up her hands, and hurried away talking to herself. "What'll Jacob say! Here I be a-settin' all the forenoon list'nin' to sech



things — an' my tubs full, an' not a potater biled for dinner."

"I guess, father, you won't have to go up to the back paster to call the cows *this* summer. We've got a boy here ez can raise the dead a'most, he's got sech lungs. I thought last night when I see him he wuz a-goin' inter a decline — but I hain't no fears sence I heard him holler this mornin'."

"We'll work him in leetle by leetle, marm; I ain't a mite feared but we can make somethin' of him in time. We'll pad him out a leetle fust, though, with lots of good cream and johnny-cakes and pancakes and maple syrup. I'm goin' ter take him up ter the back paster after dinner. The smell of them pines an' spruce'll do him good; give him an appetite, I reckon."

Jacob Foss's farm was the highest in the township. It lay on the southern slope of Beaver Tail Mountain, and his land extended to the summit. To the south the ground sloped toward the valley of the East Branch, and the house overlooked the valley east and west for six miles.

Back of the house were the barns and vegetable garden; beyond those the orchard climbed the slope; above that, walled and gated, stretched the "home pasture," where the milch cows were kept; and above that the "sugar patch," ten acres of noble sugar maples. Still beyond,



crowning the summit of Beaver Tail, were dense woodlands, — Jacob's pride, his "wood-lot," from which he drew his revenue, — and to the north of the woodland lay the back pasture, where Jacob kept his colts, yearling cattle, and sheep.

A good wood road, though steep, led to the summit of the mountain, and after dinner Jacob harnessed Ethan into a kind of wood-sled on wheels, something like a Maine "jigger," and drove up there with Miffins and the puppy, a bag of salt for his stock and sheep, and a new halter for an unbroken colt.

Having tied Ethan to the rail fence, Jacob took Miffins in his arms and carried him into the shade of a group of pines at the edge of the woodlands. There he gathered a bushel or more of pine-needles, and placed Miffins in the midst of them.

"Thar, sonny, thet'll be better'n medicine fer yer. Yer can see all over the paster from here, and ef I don't come 'round within an hour or two, don't yer fret. The colts'll make friends with yer, an' they're gentle as kittens. Yer can do a little studying 'bout sheep, too, while yer 'bout it. I'm goin' ter salt the critters first, then I'm goin' inter the wood-lot ter cut some spruce stakes. S'posing yer give that collie a lesson in sheep-tending? Yer can't begin a minute too soon with 'em." Jacob shouldered his axe and



bag of salt and crossed the pasture, calling the colts by name, calling the cattle and sheep, "Co' Bob, co' Nap, co' Bet, co' boss, co' boss, ca-duc, ca-duc."

As yet, Miffins had seen no living thing, but now, as if by magic, sheep and cattle came flocking from the shady spaces on the edge of the woods; then suddenly he heard the thud of flying hoofs, and from out the trees at his right flashed three splendid specimens of horse-flesh. They raced down the slope, across the cup-like hollow, and up the farther side, manes flying, tails straight on the wind, necks arched. Miffins shouted in his excitement. It was better than the display of Engine No. 9's three.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Jacob was surrounded, followed to the fence on the farther side of the pasture, and nosed and breathed upon by dozens of velvety nostrils. At last he had satisfied them, and, climbing the fence, disappeared in the woods.

The colts turned slowly, and trotted gently across to Miffins's corner. Suddenly they stopped, heads up, nostrils flaring; then a wild snort from all three; they had discovered the newcomer. Turning tail, they galloped away to a safe distance to investigate. With a right-about wheel, which brought them into fine line directly opposite Miffins, they halted, sniffed the



air, lifted a forefoot, pawed the ground, then slowly and quietly drew near the strange thing on the pine-needle heap. Nearer and nearer they drew, noses now close to the turf. Miffins strangled the puppy's attempt to bark, and the colts lowered their soft noses and breathed all over him.

What creatures they were! One a jet black, one a bright bay, — not a hair awry, — the third fawn-color and white, a real “calico” horse, than which Barnum or Forepaugh had nothing better to show.

Miffins laid his free hand — the other was clutching the puppy's throat — on the circus beauty's mane, — it was soft like silk, — and was just about to venture a pat on the lovely creature's nose, when all three suddenly planted their forefeet, uncomfortably near, Miffins thought, erected heads, ears, tails, and, with furious snorts, wheeled, and were off like the wind.

Miffins looked around to see what had caused the stampede, and there, balancing on the top rail of the five-barred gate, was the queerest specimen of a girl he had ever seen.

She might have been fourteen or fifteen; long-legged, red-haired, freckled, dressed in a yellow calico dress that she had outgrown by two feet, she swayed back and forth on the top rail unmindful of the gathering wrath in Miffins's face.



"Git down from that!" were his first words of command.

The girl swayed still more violently. Her sunbonnet of green and white checked gingham was hanging by one string down her back. Her rapid motion detached it; it flew over the fence, and Miffins groaned.

"Git down from that, I say," he repeated, in a still louder tone. "None o' yer jollyin'; I won't take it, d'yer hear?"

The girl threw back her head, and a peal of laughter, merry and sweet as a chime of bells, rang out upon the still air.

"How can you help it?" she said. "Here, take this. I'm not going to wear shoes in this pasture."

Still balancing herself, she stooped and loosened the lacing of her shoes, then tossed them one at a time after the sunbonnet. They fell unpleasantly near Miffins's head. The stockings, coarse blue cotton ones, followed next, and then the girl, with a spring and a bound, landed near her belongings. Miffins winced.

Seating herself, *à la Turque*, a few feet distant from the boy, she leaned her elbows on her knees, her chin in the palms of her hands, and fixed her great gray eyes on our waif. Miffins returned the stare.

"Let's see who can look longest," she said,



gravely, settling herself more solidly in her position.

Now Miffins wasn't going to be stumped by a girl, not if he knew it. So he let go the gasping puppy's throat, clinched both fists, and shook them vigorously at the image opposite him.

"Look 'n' be ——!" he shouted in his impotent wrath, and forthwith proceeded to stare his tormentor out of countenance. But he had reckoned without his host. He looked and looked, — but the gray eyes never blinked. He was looking up, which was a disadvantage, for soon the sky line made his sight blur, and the queer image opposite turned all colors — green, blue, yellow, red. He felt his eyes beginning to water; he could no longer see her. He rolled over on his face, and, in his shame and misery, dug the toe of his right shoe into the turf.

"Where did you learn to swear?" a gentle voice asked close at his ear.

Miffins kicked out with his best leg.

"Say, what *are* you mad about?" was the next question, asked this time in his ear.

This was more than Miffins could bear. He rolled over and faced his tormentor. His eyes flashed dangerously.

"Wot did yer swing on that fence fer when I told yer to git down?"



The girl laughed so merrily that Miffins was afraid he should laugh, too, in another minute.

"Oh, fences are free around here; didn't you know that?"

"Yer scared away the colts."

"Well, what if I did? What is that to you?" she asked, in amazement.

"I wanted to see 'em close to — one's a peach, a bloomin' circus dandy. There he is now! Yer can see his head just over them bushes."

"Oh, that's Nap. I'll have him over here in a minute if you want to see him," and, with a hop, skip, and a bound, she was up and off across the pasture, her red curls flying, her long legs flashing white beneath the short yellow skirt, as she sped over the green turf. Miffins heard her calling to the tune of "Yankee Doodle" as she ran:

"Come Nap, Nap, Nap, Napoleon,  
Come get your white potato.  
Come Nap, Nap, Nap, Napoleon,  
Come quick whene'er I say so."

The girl held out her hand, and the colt came whinnying up to her. Her next performance nearly took Miffins's breath away. She laid hold of the long, light-brown mane, and trotted along by his side; then, with a bound, flung herself astride upon his back. Nap reared a little, not viciously, but in a way that mildly expressed



his surprise, and then broke into a canter. How the girl managed to guide him, Miffins could not tell, but horse and rider galloped bravely up to the group of pines.

Miffins shouted to her as she drew near. "I say, yer a daisy bareback! Why don't yer join the circus?"

The girl leaped lightly to the ground, but still held the horse by the mane. Her great eyes fixed themselves eagerly on Miffins's face.

"Oh, have you seen a circus?" she said, with quickened breath.

"Course," said Miffins, scornfully, "piles on 'em. Everybody's seen a circus."

"I haven't," said the girl, sorrowfully. She brought up a heavy sigh, and added, "I'd give — I'd give almost anything if I could. Won't you tell me about them? I've seen the pictures in the village, but it doesn't seem as if they could be true. The girls wear such lovely dresses, and some of them fly right through hoops. Have you ever seen them?"

"Course," said Miffins, who began to feel of some importance again, for his wrath had vanished, and he was getting interested in a girl that could ride bareback on a colt. "They wear just the kind o' togs yer see in the pitchers. I see one get afire onc't, but they played the hose on her an' put her out. The girl was er ridin'



bareback, just like yer did, 'n' a-flyin' roun' 'n' roun' the ring, — that's where the horses run, — 'n' a paper lantern took fire overhead — ther's lots er paper lanterns hangin' from the roof — 'n' some er the sparks fell on her, 'n' she was all afire, 'n' the kids er yellin' like mad, 'n' the women er screechin', 'n' next yer know, out runs the clown with the hose, 'n' ker whiz — swish, he wet her down in er jiffy. Golly! but she was a dandy! She was on the horse, an' kep' on gallopin' lickety-split roun' an' roun', 'n' the crowd cheered 'n' yelled, 'n' then the clown turned the hose on hisself, an', when he was jest er soakin' wet, he flung onter the horse behind the girl, 'n' the two on 'em went roun' 'n' roun', 'n' the people yelled louder 'n' louder, 'n' laughed ter see the two er goin' it tergether; fer the water'd washed all the paint off the clown's face, 'n' the girl's hair was false 'n' soakin' wet with the water, 'n' fell off inter the ring, 'n' the band played 'The Girl I Left Behind Me' jest fer larks."

Miffins paused for breath. The girl let go of Nap's mane and seated herself in front of Miffins. Her cheeks were red with excitement.

"Now let's begin at the beginning," she said, drawing on her stockings and shoes.

"Wot yer givin' us?" said Miffins.

"I want to know all about it, all about how



those girls train for the circus, and how much money they get, and how they go to work to get a place. But first I want to know your name."

"Miffins."

"Miffins what?"

"Dunno. Wot's yer own?"

"Nance."

"Nance what?"

"Nance Liscom. My father was Squire Liscom. I live with my uncle summers, just over the woods there, and winters with my father's second wife. She's the one that won't let me go to the circus when it comes to Montpelier. Are you the boy that's come to live at Mr. Foss's?"

"Yup."

"I'll tell you something if you won't tell. Mr. Foss tells the men in the village how easy it's been breaking in his colts, and I've ridden all three of them with and without a halter before he has touched them!"

"Bully fer yer. I'll tell yer wot," said Miffins, waxing eloquent, "we can have a circus right up here, 'n' I'll show yer jest how they do it—hoops 'n' all; that'll be better'n tellin'."

"Oh, will you? What fun! When can we begin?"



"Jest the nex' time yer can sneak away up here when I'm here. Can't yer bring a whip with yer?"

"Oh, yes, uncle has two or three."

"Well, bring a reg'lar snapper — st! the old duffer's er comin'!"

Nance was over the five-barred gate in a trice, and threw herself down among the brakes. Then she could listen without being seen.

Jacob stopped to unhitch Ethan, and then drove over to the pines.

"Here, sonny, here's yer collie. I found him worriting the sheep up thar toward the woodlot — found the hull on 'em jest ready ter clear the stone wall — an' this pesterin' cur ez happy ez er lord! He'll do. But what's happened to git the pink inter yer cheeks? Seen my colts?"

"Yup. The calico one's er dandy."

"Yer 'bout right thar, sonny. Nap can't be beat in the State er Vermont. Guess I'll hev ter bring yer up here agin; this air's better'n er tonic."

"When yer comin' again?" said Miffins, more loudly than was necessary, for he wanted Nance to hear.

"I ain't deaf, sonny," said Jacob, smiling. "I calc'late ter come up ter-morrer, if this weather holds, 'n' draw what I've cut. Want to come?"

"Yup."



As Jacob turned the "jigger," Miffins looked through the bars of the gate, and saw a sun-bonnet flap wildly three times from out the midst of the tall brakes. He knew Nance had understood.



## CHAPTER IV.

### *The Circus in the Back Pasture*

WHETHER it was the bracing mountain air, or Martha Foss's wholesome food, or the excitement of the prospective circus, Miffins felt the next day like another boy. There were no lumps in his throat to clear away, and his active newsboy's spirit hated idleness. He had had enough of that already in the hospital. He was glad to do something.

Jacob was about to lift him into the hammock, when Miffins began to wriggle so vigorously that the man tightened his arms about the boy to prevent him from slipping to the floor.

"Hello!" he said, in a surprised voice, "seems ter me yer've got some muscle left yit."

"Lemme go," said Miffins, continuing to wriggle. "I don't want ter lay 'round in that shebang any longer — it's the navvies as has 'em ter sleep in. Gimme something ter do."

Jacob deposited him in an old-fashioned cush-



ioned rocking-chair on the porch. Then he slapped his thigh, and exclaimed: "It's come sooner'n I'd looked fer. Marm! Marm! Come here; the boy wants ter work."

Martha's smiling face appeared at the woodshed door.

"Well, that beats all. Ther's plenty ter do most er the time, but you've got ter begin kinder sparin'. S'posin' you sit right here 'n' peel them pertaters, 'n' I'll chop this meat 'n' apples, 'n' you can finish tellin' me 'bout that cock-fightin' business we wuz interrupted in yesterday. I don't deny as how I'll take more interest, arter this, in seein' them great spurred Plymouth Rocks in the barnyard a-layin' each other out. I've allus beat 'em apart with the mop-handle, but I'm goin' ter let 'em have it out the nex' time."

Thus Martha and Miffins came to spend many a forenoon on the porch, busied with all sorts of household work, and, little by little, drawing near to each other in close companionship. For Miffins told her tale after tale of his New York life, and Martha told him all about her rather distant neighbors, her own family, and, at last, she spoke to him of her one little son, of his beauty and merry laugh and his helpful ways, of his studies and playmates, and showed him the boy's skates and sled. But all this was long



after this special morning on the porch when Miffins pared potatoes for the first time, and seeded raisins when Martha was looking, and ate them when she wasn't.

On that special morning, Martha Foss told Miffins about her nearest neighbor, Squire Liscom's brother, led on by the boy's apparently aimless questions.

"Ain't ther no kids 'round here?"

"We've got a few goats up yonder thet you ain't seen, a bothersome old ram, 'n' a half-dozen ewes, 'n' father said ther' wuz two or three kids come along last week. What made you think er them?"

Miffins stared for a minute, then a broad smile broke over his face.

"I meant, ain't ther no boys 'round here?"

"Oh, boys," said Martha, mildly, "well, then, I'd say what I meant ef I wuz you; folks up here might laugh at you, ef you didn't."

Now Miffins was no fool. Like most of the newsboy tribe, his wits had been sharpened by contact with all sorts of people, his energy developed in his trade, and, without knowing it, he had become a good reader of character, "sizin' up," he called it. But this mild woman nonplussed him. He could not tell whether she was making fun of him or not. He decided he wouldn't take any chances on that word again, not if he could help it.



“No, ther’s no boys just ’round here. Mr. Liscom, — he’s our nex’ neighbor, — he hain’t no children, but his niece, Nance Liscom, spends the summers with him ever sence her father died, five year ago come December. Some folks don’t like Nance, but I do. She’s an awkward, red-haired girl, ’n’ queer is no name fer her. She’s got notions ’bout what she wants ter be — where she got ’em, the land knows — ’n’ makes herself pretty miser’ble thinkin’ ’bout it. They’ve had shows down in the village, ’n’ Mis’ Liscom — thet’s her father’s second wife — won’t let her go, fer she says she couldn’t git nothin’ out of her fer months afterwuds. She stays with Mis’ Liscom winters, so I only see her summers. Mebbe she’ll come over here ef she knows you’ve come. But I wouldn’t say much to her ’bout what you’ve been tellin’ me.”

Miffins pared his last potato in silence.

It was a glorious day, and after dinner Jacob and Miffins drove up to the back pasture.

Miffins hadn’t long upon his arrival to wait. No sooner had Jacob disappeared in the woods, than a green and white checked gingham sun-bonnet flew up from among the brakes.

“Coast’s clear,” called Miffins.

A merry laugh answered him, and over the five-barred gate leaped nimble Nance.

“Did yer bring the whip?”



"Yes, it's over there in the brakes; I'll get it." And over she went again as lightly as if the long legs had been made of cork and rubber.

She handed it to Miffins, who fingered it caressingly. He had always wanted just such a whip to snap, and now he had it.

Suddenly he raised it, but both arm and whip were caught and held by Nance.

"Don't snap it yet; wait till I get the colt and haul you down to the hollow. We've got to use the hollow for the ring. Here, see what I've brought for you."

Miffins looked on in amazement. This girl was no end o' larks! She lay flat on the ground by the lower rail of the pasture gate and pulled through a huge wooden shovel. A road snow-shovel, she explained to her companion. It was light and broad and shallow. Then she leaped the fence again, and threw over two soft sheepskins. These she spread in the bottom of the snow-shovel, and said, triumphantly:

"There now, who says you can't ride? Here, crawl in, I can't lift you."

Miffins growled. "I don't want to be lifted. I can git in myself." It cost him many a sharp twinge, but he set his teeth and accomplished it.

"Now hold on to the sides, and I'll go slow," said Nance, and, grasping the long handle with both hands, she gently drew the shovel down



the slope to the "hollow," a level space of ground at least two hundred by three hundred feet.

"You see, I had to get you here first, for Nap wouldn't come near this shovel and the sheepskins; horses are so dreadfully afraid of skins. Now slide out, and I'll take this up into the bushes;" and away she went with the uncouth equipage bouncing along behind her.

Back she came, calling Nap to her old tune:

"Come Nap, Nap, Nap, Napoleon," etc.

Whinnying and snorting, Nap came cantering up to Nance. She patted his nose, and, laying her own against it, rubbed the freckled tip up and down the white stripe that extended from between the ears to the pink nostrils.

"This colt is a Morgan; look at his ankles, how slender they are. He's a beauty, isn't he? Now, Nap," she said, looking the colt straight in the face, "there's to be no nonsense. This is a whip. Smell it!"

Nap flared his nostrils, and breathed all over the lash.

"Now, Miffins, you snap it, — not very loud, — and I'll hold on to Nap; ready!"

Snap, snap. Nap reared gently, almost lifting Nance from the ground.

"Now I'll get on," she said, "and you can



snap louder. I'll guide him round the hollow with this halter," and she proceeded to put it on without much resistance on Nap's part, "and you can do just as you know they do at the circus."

She seized the horse's mane, and repeated her performance of the preceding afternoon. Just as she was about to spring on, Miffins shouted, in his excitement:

"Hoop-la!" and cracked his whip, a real ring-man's crack.

Away went the colt and Nance; round and round the hollow they flew, and Miffins snapped the whip at the rate of twenty snaps to the minute, and his "Hoop-la!" was drowned in the thud of the flying hoofs.

After five minutes of this exercise, Nap took matters into his own care. He refused to mind the halter, and dashed madly up the slope toward the fence, which he prepared to take. It was then that Nance, on the alert for her chance, slipped off, and, leaving the colt pawing the fourth rail, ran back almost breathless to Miffins.

"Bully fer *you*," said Miffins to the panting girl. "But, say, I wish yer wouldn't try no fences yet; it give me the creeps."

Nance laughed with what breath she had left, and when she regained it, said:

"Oh, I've taken fences before now, and been



thrown, too. But I've learned when to get off, you see. Now, I'll draw you up."

"No, yer won't," said Miffins, stoutly. "I ain't er goin' ter let no girl draw me *up* hill. I'll stay here till the old duffer comes back; I can make it all straight with him."

"What makes you call him 'duffer'?"

"Coz I don't know wot else ter call him."

"Why don't you call him 'Mr. Foss'?"

"I ain't er dude."

"A what?"

"Er dude."

"What's that?"

Miffins chuckled.

"It's one of the misters that carries a cane in their mouths, wears no end of togs, ties, yer know, 'n' bag coats 'n' ironed pants."

Nance was evidently mystified.

"What do you call Mrs. Foss?"

"Nothin'."

"I guess I'll have to teach you your manners," said the girl, gravely. "I was coming over to see you to-morrow, and find out when we could have some more circus, but I sha'n't come till you learn to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Foss as you ought to. They're good friends of mine, and I won't hear them called 'duffer' and 'nothin',' so now."

"Well, yer needn't get so mad about it. Wot d'yer want me to call 'em?"



Nance smiled upon him. She had a pretty mouth and a set of white, even teeth, which made one forget the freckles and dark red hair.

"I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll come over to-morrow and ask Mrs. Foss what she wants you to call them."

"All right," said Miffins. "Don't yer go back on me."

"Not I," laughed Nance. Just then her keen eyes caught sight of the sheep scattering to right and left of the wood-lot.

"Mr. Foss's coming," she cried. "I must get the shovel and myself out of the way," and off she bounded up the slope.

"How'd yer git down here, sonny?" shouted Jacob, when half-way across the hollow.

"Slid down," shouted Miffins in return, telling the truth, but not the whole truth.

"Yer comin' on purty fast," said Jacob, with a contented smile. "Guess we can try on them crutches 'fore long."

Somehow Miffins did not care to answer.

Nance was true to her word. The next morning she made her appearance at "The Roost," as Jacob Foss had named his house on the southern slope of Beaver Tail.

Martha Foss welcomed her with a hearty kiss, and the girl flung her long arms tight around the little pincushion of a woman — for Martha



was short and round, with pink cheeks and crinkly brown hair — and hugged her breath almost out of her.

“There, that’ll do for now,” laughed Martha, breathlessly. “Set right down here on the porch an’ tell me all about your folks. I hain’t seen one on ’em sence plantin’. But fust, I want you to git acquainted with our boy.” Martha spoke with all the pride of ownership, and somehow Miffins liked to hear it.

“I know him already,” said Nance, lifting her great eyes frankly to Martha’s. “I came across him in the back pasture the other day when I was picking wild strawberries. How d’you do?” She held out her hand to Miffins, who took it awkwardly enough, and didn’t know when to drop it. Nance laughed merrily.

“Guess you haven’t shaken hands with many girls, by the way you hold on! Why —” she exclaimed, taking the boy’s hand, and flattening it out on the pink palm of her own, “why, how thin and small it is! Mrs. Foss, do you think that hand will do much work?” and she held it up for Martha’s inspection.

“Le’go,” said Miffins.

“Well, yes, I *do*,” said Martha, emphatically; “those hands have begun already.” And she smiled at the boy, who felt suddenly an unwonted sensation beneath his blouse, very near the fifth



and sixth ribs on the left side. He snatched his hand from Nance, and, to hide his feeling, frowned at the girl, who laughed a low, amused, tormenting laugh.

“I asked Miffins what he called you, Mrs. Foss — ”

“Shet up, will yer?” said Miffins, gruffly. He, who had feared nothing in his life, was actually afraid of this girl’s tongue.

“You mustn’t speak to me that way, Miffins; I’m not used to it,” said Nance, drawing herself up with great dignity, and the air of insulted majesty. “You haven’t come up here to tell people when they shall speak and when they sha’n’t, nor to interfere in any way with our rights as free-born Vermonters. We’re free as well as fences — as you’ll find out, if you stay long enough.” Then, ignoring Miffins’s presence, she continued: “Miffins says he calls you ‘Nothin’,” which he has no right to, because we all know you’re very much of something. Now, what do you want him to call you?”

“Why, I hadn’t thought anything about it,” replied Martha, “but it would be kinder awkward not to be called nothin’. What do you call Jacob, Miffins?”

Miffins was busy whittling some skewers for Martha’s boiled meats, and found it convenient to cut his thumb just at that moment. Martha



exclaimed as she saw the blood, and hurried away to get a rag and arnica.

"I've found a hoop," said Nance, in a triumphant whisper, as soon as Martha had disappeared. "Can't you come up to the back pasture berrying some time this week? I'll go up every afternoon to be sure and not miss you."

"I'll fix it," said Miffins, in the same tone, "but don't you peach!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Nance. "If you'll speak English, perhaps I can understand you."

"What d'yer take me fer, anyway?" Miffins's voice rose suddenly to C sharp. "I ain't no Dago, I'm er 'Merican citizen, 'n' I —"

His sentence remained unfinished, for Martha appeared with rag and bottle, and Nance continued, volubly:

"Miffins says he's an American citizen, Mrs. Foss."

"Thet's right, my boy. I like to see young folks stick up fer the land of their birth." Martha wound the strip of cotton cloth carefully about the bony thumb. "S'posin' you call me Mother Foss. I'd like that ez well ez anything." She drew her hand across her eyes, and Miffins had an uncomfortable minute.

"Won't you stay ter dinner, Nance?" she said, as Nance made a movement to go.



“Not to-day, thank you, Mrs. Foss. Aunt Jane expects me to help her get dinner, for company’s coming.”

“Do tell!” said Martha, eagerly. “Who be they?”

“Oh, some city folks — cousins, second or third, of my father’s; they’re driving over from the Adirondacks, and taking us in on the way. They’ve never been here before, and Aunt Jane is all upset over it; thank fortune, they’re only going to be here to dinner. But I’ve got to go home and whip the cream; we’ve plenty of wild strawberries to eat with it, and Aunt Jane’s roasted two chickens, and the table’s set in the front hall, because there’s a good view from there over the mountains, and Aunt Jane says city folks always want to eat with a view. I sha’n’t see them if I can help it!” Nance tossed her head, and with a fling of her sun-bonnet gave Martha a peck on her cheek, blew a kiss at Miffins, much to his confusion, and walked airily away.

“She’s a queer mixture,” said Martha, watching the tall, lithe figure as it swung along the road. “But she’d oughter have a mother. She had one of the best and purtiest that ever breathed till she was six, an’ when she lost her father, she lost all. She’s different from all the gals ’round here, an’ she lets ’em know it. She’s taken quite



a shine to you, an' I'm glad on it. They say she's read every book on the first four shelves of her father's library, an' she won't go to the dees-tric' school any longer — says she knows more'n the teachers, an' I guess from all I hear she ain't fur from the truth. Her step-mother's too mean to send her away to school, an' her own mother hadn't no near blood relations, so there's nobody to do for her. My heart aches for her sometimes, for she's the lovin'est soul, if you git to know her well, an' she takes to you."

During this long speech Nance was rapidly covering the mile of pasture and woodland that separated the two farms. But her thoughts outstripped her pace, and her imagination was ranging far and wide.

For the one great pleasure of this girl's life was in "imagining things." She had never had an opportunity to see anything of the world beyond the boundaries of her native county. Two years after her mother died, her father, squire and judge and State's attorney, had married his housekeeper, for what, save for her excellent housekeeping qualities, no one had been able to find out. And when the little girl's father died, a year afterward, there was no one to understand her, no one to care in reality what became of her, except Dan, her father's faithful man of all work, and Uncle Reuben, her father's



brother, an invalid for many years, who, with his devoted wife, lived a life of seclusion in their isolated home over the mountain.

Squire Liscom had inherited a large landed estate from his father, but the returns from it were small, for the young squire was too bound up in his books and career to care for rotation of crops and fancy cattle. One summer, when he was at home from college, some New York people, distant relatives of his mother, had stopped on their way from Saratoga at the old New England mansion, to enjoy its hospitality. Then it was that his mother urged one of their guests, a lovely girl of twenty-one, to stay awhile in the Green Mountain air. Soon the old story repeated itself, and when the young squire had been entered at the bar, he and his lovely city bride took possession of the old home, then vacant.

Thus it happened that Nancy Liscom had had the most careful up-bringing—father and mother both guiding and teaching, with pride in the little girl's quick intelligence, and loving care for gentleness and refinement of manners.

But for five years the child, save for the last three summers at her uncle's, had run wild without any one to care in reality for her. Her step-mother remained housekeeper in her aims and ambitions. To keep the house spotless, front



door locked, sitting-room and library closed with drawn shades and tight blinds, bedrooms and halls darkened to keep out flies and prevent the carpets from fading; to scrub, to sweep, to wash, to fret, to add to her poultry and milch cows, to sell her butter at fancy prices; to live in the kitchen and use the back door for the sake of saving the front of the house; to scold Dan and misrule Nancy, seemed the sole objects in her life; and she attained them all.

Little Nancy Liscom could no more flourish in such an atmosphere than could a flower in a sunless cellar.

She had but one comfort within the house — her father's and mother's books. Without, she had Dan, her confidant and consolation in troublous times, her companion and instructor in natural things in peaceful ones.

Until it was too cold, her reading-room was the hay-loft. Here under a large window she lay upon the sweet-smelling hay, and devoured "Kenilworth" and "Rob Roy," "Robinson Crusoe" and "Little Lord Fauntleroy;" cried over "Nicholas Nickleby" and "David Copperfield" and Little Nell, and laughed merrily with Sam Weller and Pickwick. She slept with "Little Women" under her pillow for two months, and imagined herself Jo and Amy alternately. She loved Mary Queen of Scots and



hated Elizabeth. She loathed her own red hair for its own sake and because it was the color of Elizabeth's, and after reading "The Ugly Duckling," she made a vow, which she kept for a year, never to look in her little mirror, because she was so homely.

In one winter she read "Macbeth" and "Lear," "Hamlet" and "King John," and in consequence hid her head at night beneath the bedclothes, shivering with fear if a board in the floor sprang with the cold, the branches of the maple just outside the window rattled icily against the frost-covered panes, or the wind roared in the chimney.

All these years of reading and "imagining" had, at last, made her restless and rebellious, and when the longing to be out in the world, to mingle with people whom she imagined to be noble and handsome and generous and gallant, like the people in her book-world, became intolerable, she would saddle the friskiest colt in the stalls, and, unknown to every one but Dan, who had taught her to ride at six, gallop madly over hill and down dale, taking a fence here and a stone wall there, exhausting, after four hours of hard riding, both herself and the horse.

"That girl'll come to grief," said many a farmer's wife, as she looked out of the door after the flying steed; and if she had, there were only a few who would not have said: "I told you so!"



To-day, as she walked with a light, free step over the summit of Beaver Tail, she was imagining all sorts of things about these city people who were coming to dinner. She imagined herself as she would like to be, and saw herself, a beautiful girl with golden hair and blue eyes, clad in a pale blue muslin dress, with a broad silk sash to match, standing in the hall door to receive the guests. She would descend the two steps gracefully, and putting out her delicate hand, welcome them to all the hospitality of the simple home. She saw just how they all looked, what each had on, how each looked at her in admiration, and heard them compliment her. Before they went they urged her to visit them in their city home. She accepted the invitation, and when they had gone, amused herself with imagining how the city house was furnished, and what kind of toilets they wore at balls and receptions. She remembered they had said she should choose what pleasures she would while visiting them.

“I’ll go to the circus once a week while I’m there, and then I’ll go to see ‘Macbeth’ and ‘Lear’ and ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream;’ but if I were invited to a ball I don’t know what I’d wear; let me see. I love pale blue, and perhaps a pale blue satin with a train” (she imagined herself always as dressed like a grown-up young lady with a train, when her vivid fancy



pictured the balls and receptions that she thought made up the wonderful life in cities) — “and I’d have a simple coronet of pearls in my hair, and carry a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley. About my slippers, — h’m!”

She stopped short in her rapid walk and put out one foot. A heavy laced calf-skin shoe hid all lines of grace. She stamped her foot passionately on the soft turf.

“I hate it so!” she cried, just as a voice called wearily, and a little fretfully:

“Oh, Nance, do hurry. It’s most time for them to come, and the cream isn’t whipped, and you can’t be seen in that rig. Hurry ’round to the back door. I wouldn’t have them see you now for anything.”

Nance needed no urging. She flew around to the kitchen door, enveloped herself in a huge blue and white checked apron, and taking the cream from the ice-box, began beating with might and main. Suddenly over the hills sounded the notes of a horn.

“They’re coming, Nance,” cried her aunt, “do hurry and get ready,” and she hastened into the front hall to greet the merry party on the tally-ho that drew up under the shade of the great elms and beeches which bordered the mountain road.

Nance, peeking out of the sitting-room win-



dow, saw and heard all: the courteous greetings, the charming nothings which sounded so much, the merry exchange of banter among themselves as inside and outside passengers to the number of eight were safely landed on the noiseless turf.

What pretty girls! Three of them, in short skirts, fresh blouses, and pink and blue and brown coaching jackets, long gauntleted gloves, and soft straw Tam-o'-Shanters. And the three young men! How devoted they were! first to the lovely, gray-haired woman with delicate, high-bred face, who stepped so lightly toward Mrs. Liscom, saying, in the kind of voice Nance had imagined high-bred ladies to have:

"This seems an imposition, Mrs. Liscom, but I could not come without them, and I was unwilling to drive through this part of the mountains without stopping to see Mr. Liscom, and at least inquire for his brother's child, although only a fourth cousin."

Nance waited to hear no more. Show herself to those lovely girls and that beautiful woman and those gay young men! Not she, with her red hair and freckles and skimpy best calico, which came only to the tops of her thick boots. She snatched her sunbonnet from the kitchen table, and was off and away over the hill to the back pasture before the guests had even seated themselves in the cool front hall.



Only once she stopped, at the sugar-house half-way up the hill in the woods. She entered, and took from a peg in the wall a huge hoop, — a vat hoop, which she had found behind the little hut, — and then she was off again, never pausing until she threw herself face downward among the tall brakes, and cooled her burning cheeks against their green fronds.

She felt safe at last. There were no critical city eyes to look upon her — only Nap's soft brown ones rested on her as she lay prone, too unhappy to give him even a word.



## CHAPTER V.

### *The Last Rehearsal*

IT must have been near four o'clock when she heard a voice the other side of the fence.

"I'll be back, sonny, 'fore sundown; when a colt breaks loose, there ain't no tellin' where he'll fetch up. I might find Bet somewheres between here 'n' Montpelier."

Miffins was just thinking of his poor luck in coming so late that there was no chance of seeing Nance — forgetting she had company at home — when suddenly, after Jacob's entire disappearance in the woods, a green and white checked gingham sunbonnet flew over the fence.

"Hi there! Nance! How'd yer know I wuz er comin'?"

"I didn't," said Nance, leaping the fence. "I came up here to get out of the way of those city folks. I hate them!" she cried, with flashing eyes. Miffins stared.

"Wot's up?" he inquired.

"Nothing's up," retorted Nance, "it's all



down. I'm so discouraged. I'm down in my mind, clear down in my boots;" and down she flung herself upon the pine-needles, sobbing as if her heart would break.

Now Miffins had seen girls of all ages, big ones from the slums and little ones from the back alleys; he had seen them fight and squabble and howl with rage over a rotten banana, a rag pile, of a stale bun; but he had never seen a girl in the very abandonment of grief and woe, face downward on the earth, shaken with convulsive sobs simply because she was discouraged.

He was unable to face the situation. He hitched himself along toward the sunbonnet that was hanging by one string from a blackberry bush, and fitted it over his fist. Then he called Nap, who was nosing the prostrate figure, unable to comprehend why he was neglected.

The colt walked sedately over to Miffins, and smelt of the sunbonnet, then looked at him with a look which, if it meant anything, meant, "What can I do?"

Suddenly a clown's old trick popped into the boy's remembrance, and forthwith he proceeded to act upon the suggestion. Stroking and rubbing the soft nose, he laid firm hold upon the horse's mane. Again he let him smell of the sunbonnet. Then, taking a good bit of maple sugar from his pocket, he broke it into smaller



pieces, and holding it in the palm of one hand, with the other he gently hoisted the sunbonnet over Nap's head, and let it settle lightly over his ears.

Nap tossed his head once and whisked, or tried to, his ears, but Miffins held on with a firm hand, and the horse, busy with the sugar, was not aware that the green gingham strings, tied so deftly in a bow under his jaws, were anything more than a light-weight halter. He looked up from nosing in the grass for the last crumb of sweet in mild surprise at the roar of laughter which burst from Miffins at the picture the colt presented.

Nance had stopped sobbing, and was beginning to feel slightly ashamed of herself for having cried before a boy, when a howl of mirth brought her quickly to a sitting position. Her eyes and nose were red with crying, and the woebegone figure of the girl faced the ludicrous one of the surprised and sunbonneted colt. Miffins rolled over and over, convulsed with laughter at the sight. "Oh, my eye!" he groaned, rather than spoke, for he ached with laughing, "here's larks! I say, Nance, yer've got a cinch on the circus. Ther can't nothin' beat this. Oh, golly — I shall bust."

Nance stared at first; then a peal of merry laughter rang out over the hilltop. Nance was herself again.



"Does that belong to the circus, too?" she asked.

"Yup — Oh, my! wait a minit 'n' I'll tell yer. Lemme git my windpipes clear." He coughed vigorously, then continued. "Yup, that's jest what the clown does, only he rides the horses round the ring, bonnet 'n' all. I'll bet yer can do it, too, in time."

"I sha'n't," said Nance, promptly, with a return of dignity. "I shall not lower myself playing clown's tricks. I'm going to be a beautiful bareback rider with a dress such as I have seen in the pictures. I've brought my hoop now for practice."

"Hev yer, though?" said Miffins, eagerly. "Let's begin, then, 'fore it's too late. See here, I've got my crutches with me, so I can stan' 'n' hold the hoop."

But there was a third one to be consulted in the matter — Nap, who did not take as kindly to the hoop as to the sunbonnet. There was backing and curvetting and rearing and snorting before he could be made to approach the hoop and smell of it. Then there were coaxings innumerable before he would so much as put his head through, and it was near sundown when Nance thought of her flight from home, and Jacob made his appearance from the woods leading Bet, and Nap trotted gaily to meet her and whinny his wonderful experience.



Meanwhile the city guests had enjoyed their lunch in the front hall, the roast chicken, delicate rolls and delicious Jersey butter, the fresh sponge cakes, the wild strawberries and whipped cream.

But where was Nance? The ladies wanted to see her. The gentlemen were smoking the after-lunch cigars with Mr. Liscom under the elms, and after expressing a courteous wish to meet her, fell into animated talk with their host on the breeding of true Morgans.

Mrs. Liscom fidgeted about, hoping Nance would appear soon. She had gone out to call her to lunch, but, not finding her in the kitchen, took it for granted she was changing her gown.

"She's shy of strangers," she said, apologetically, "but she'll be down soon." Finally she went to the foot of the stairs.

"Nance," she called, "Nance, are you ready?"

There was no answer. She hurried up-stairs to the girl's room, to find it vacant, and the best calico dress hanging untouched in the closet. She came down and went out of the back door to the barn, the carriage-house, calling "Nance!" At last she returned, her face flushed with vexation and the exertion.

"I declare," she said, as she appeared among her guests again, "I don't know what to make of that girl at times. She's none of my blood —



begging your pardon, Mrs. Barnard — or perhaps I could understand her better. She comes out strong at the most unexpected times, and at others, when you look for most, she's weaker than water. She's gone somewhere, hidden herself, I dare say, because she is shy about meeting city people."

"I should like to have seen her," said the lady, courteously. "I remember to have seen her father once when he was a young boy and in the city. My youngest sister knew her mother well. She was a great belle, and all her set wondered when she decided to make her home among the mountains. My cousin, I have been told, was a remarkable man, with a great career before him had he lived. You will remember us to her, won't you? And tell her not to run away from her relations another time. The truth is," she added, with a shrug of her shoulders, "she can't afford to, she has too few — and I thought possibly we might be useful to her sometime. But if she is as odd as you say, perhaps she will flourish best on her native soil. Transplanting might spoil her." And amid thanks for the bountiful hospitality, the party mounted the tally-ho and drove away, the notes of the horn echoing gaily among the hills.

About half-past seven, Nance made her appearance at the back door. She knew, deep down



in her heart, that she had been guilty of the greatest discourtesy, and she dreaded to meet her uncle and aunt. She paused at the door, dangling her sunbonnet.

"Nancy Liscom," said her aunt, severely, without turning her head, "where have you been?"

"Up in the back pasture."

"Well, all I've got to say to you is that you ought to be downright ashamed of such actions. You've disgraced your good name, which was your father's and mother's, and if your relations never have anything more to do with you it's your own fault. You've disgraced me and your uncle as well. You're too old to be punished like a child, but I hope your conscience will do the work. Go to bed, for I don't want to see you again to-night. I've no patience left with you."

Never before had Aunt Liscom spoken thus to her husband's niece, and never had Nance better deserved the truth. She felt this, although unwilling to acknowledge it, and went up to her room with no sign of repentance. But once she had closed the door, she flung herself down upon her bed and cried herself to sleep.

For the rest of that summer Nance was angelic.

"That scolding did her good," Mrs. Liscom



observed to her husband, after a particularly trying day. "She's been like a different girl ever since. She's like my right hand in everything, and there's nothing she can't turn her hand to — from making your broth to putting up berries. As for picking them, she's like a machine, so quick and steady. I don't know but it's turned out all for the best that her folks didn't see her that day, for she's improved so in her looks and ways they'd hardly know it was the same girl. I really think she'll make a fine woman if that Jane Slocum" (Mrs. Liscom could never be brought to recognize her brother-in-law's wife as anybody but "Jane Slocum") "doesn't nag her to death winters. I'm sorry the girl's got to go back in September. Just hear her; it does my heart good."

"Come fill up my cup, come fill up my can,  
Come saddle the horses and call up the men;  
Come, open your doors, and let me gae free,  
For it's up with the bonnets of Bonnie Dundee."

Nance's voice rang out sweetly and clearly, as she came bounding in from the road, swinging her sunbonnet in one hand, in the other a noble Brahma hen which she held by its two feet and head downward.

"It's all 'up' with this sunbonnet, Aunt Liscom; look!"



She held the green and white checked gingham, which was rent in all directions, up to inspection. "Mr. Foss's old ram thought it was a head of cabbage or something like, and chewed it! And this hen Mrs. Foss sends you as a present; she *will* sit, and has been sitting, on nothing, too, for two months, and Mrs. Foss says she is worn out seeing her around."

"Well, Nance," she replied, with a smile, "if *you* take her in hand there'll be no 'sittin' round' for the hen any more than there has been for poor Miffins. Mrs. Foss said that used to worry the boy so at first, but since you've taken hold of him, she hasn't heard anything of it."

"I like Miffins," said Nance, gravely; "he helps me, and I'm awfully sorry for him although I don't say so."

"He's getting pretty chummy with the Slocum boys and Parson Leonard's boy; they seem to like him, too."

"Yes," said Nance, abstractedly, and went to the barn to shut up the hen.

It was already late in August, and during the past two months Nance and Miffins had seen much of each other. The boy admired the girl for her daring and skill in riding, and respected her tongue. Little by little—although he would have scorned the suggestion of such a thing—he had dropped much of the street slang, and



improved his English under her autocratic rule. He could not quarrel with a girl for correcting him in his speech, who entered into the fun of the circus as she did, who told him stories of bear and coon hunts, and wonderful feats of strength of her pet heroes, and listened with eager ears to all his tales of the city's sights and sounds.

Nance, on the other hand, found Miffins useful to her in the slow development of a deeply laid scheme, of which, up to this time, Miffins knew nothing.

Coming down-stairs the next morning after her merited rebuke, she found on the hall table sixteen cards, a double set of eight, with the names and residences of each of the guests. She took them in to her aunt.

"What do these mean?" she demanded, with her head in the air, as if scenting an insult.

"It means," replied Mrs. Liscom, quietly, "that when your cousins found you had been so impolite as to run away from them after they had driven over to see you, they left a set of cards for you and one for me, to show that *they* extended the hospitality of their home to you, and *would be at home when you called.*"

Mrs. Liscom, having heaped high her coals of fire, turned again to her work. Nance kept the eight cards, and they were the germ of her



scheme. How that scheme developed later we shall see. Meanwhile the circus practice had kept on whenever opportunities presented — and they were many.

Nance would appear at the Roost early with a tin lunch-pail well filled, and an empty eight-quart milk-pail.

“Mr. Foss, can’t you take us up to the back pasture for raspberries this morning?”

“Why, ter be sure I can, Nance. Got yer lunch? Goin’ to make a day of it, air yer?”

Or, “Mr. Foss, when you cut that piece of hay back of the wood-lot, can’t Miffins and I ride up too?”

“Course yer can.”

Or, “Mr. Foss, won’t you let me hitch up Ethan and drive up with Miffins to salt the colts and sheep, you’re so busy haying?”

“Thank ye, thank ye, Nance. I’d be glad ter hev ye. I’m so drove this weather, and git all het up goin’ up there after chores.”

So the afternoons and forenoons were many during July and the first part of August for the two comrades to play at circus to their hearts’ content. And it was astonishing what progress Nap and the girl had made under Miffins’s tutelage.

Finding that Nap could not be induced to step even through the hoop, Miffins hit upon



the idea of accustoming him first to hurdles. This was easily arranged. Jacob had cut hundreds of slim birches in the woods, and piled them near some split hickory.

Nance availed herself of Ethan and the jigger, on the occasions when she drove up with Miffins to salt the colts, to load on a little of the split wood and three birch poles. Up near the pine-trees they made a low hurdle, by resting the ends of the birch pole on two firm piles of hickory. Little by little, Nap was taught to take these standing, then, when he could take the height of three fence bars, the snow-shovel was brought into use, loaded up with the wood, and the hurdle set up in the hollow.

Here Nap had free course, and took the hurdle beautifully every time, with Nance proudly erect on his back. That was a great day for both when the colt cantered round and round, taking the hurdle with such grace and sure-footedness that Miffins forgot to crack his whip, so lost was he in admiration.

But how to manage the hoop? Nap could only be induced to put his nose through it when there was an ear of corn or a potato or a lump of sugar held tantalizingly just beyond his nose on the other side.

"I've got it!" said Miffins one day, when the two comrades were about to acknowledge themselves vanquished in their attempts.



"I'll stand by the hurdle 'n' hold the hoop on it with one hand, and with the other I'll hold out a ear of green corn just beyond it on the farther side, 'n' I shouldn't wonder if that would fetch him."

No sooner said than done. Miffins balanced himself with his crutch, and held the light hoop firmly on the birch pole. In the other hand he held out the ear of corn, and awaited the event. Nap was galloping bravely, enjoying the fun as much as either of them. Nance urged him to greater speed. As he approached the hurdle, he pricked his ears, for he saw the half-husked ear of corn seemingly almost within reach. Rising gracefully, he was up and through and over before he knew a hoop had encircled him for a second, and, with a snap in passing, he caught the ear by the husks, and flew on with the tid-bit dangling from his mouth.

How the two laughed! How they gloried in that triumph, while Nap, all unconscious that *he* had been vanquished, munched the succulent vegetable with intense relish.

Of course, it was easy after that, and not so much fun. Nance noticed that Miffins had a good deal to say about the Slocum boys and Jim Leonard, and, at times, his thoughts were evidently anywhere but with her and Nap. But one day she gave him a surprise.



Over the fence there came, not the Nance he had known, but a young girl dressed in white, with bare neck and arms of a dazzling white, cheeks pink with excitement, and a wand of silver, or so it seemed to the dazed boy.

"Well, how do you like the looks?" she said, trying to speak indifferently.

"By cracky! but you're a peach, Nance. Where'd you get that bloomin' circus dress 'n' the stick?"

"It does pretty well, doesn't it? I patterned it after one that was left on the poster in the bridge as you drive down to Barnet. See," she lifted some of the numerous petticoats, "they're all made of cheese-cloth. I've starched the under ones, and the stick I covered with silver paper. I earned it all picking berries. *Now*" — she almost shouted in her joy — "we'll have a dress rehearsal, and it'll be the last one," she added, significantly.

"What d'yer mean?" said Miffins.

"I'll tell you when we get through." And forthwith the hurdle was set up, and Nap was put through his best paces, and flew time and again through the hoop, enjoying the fun as much as the boy and girl.

It was a pretty sight! The cup-like hollow, — the green slopes and woodlands surrounding it, — the white birch hurdle, the beautiful white



and fawn-color horse, the graceful figure of the girl in her white, fluffy, short skirts, white stockings and home-made white cloth sandals, the long, dark-red curls falling back over the white neck, her gray eyes black with excitement, and the silver paper wand flashing in the level rays of the setting sun.

Miffins threw up his straw hat — then his whip — in his ecstasy of delight.

“Oh, Nance!” he cried, as she finished the last round, and Nap trotted gracefully up to him to receive the never-failing tidbit, “Oh, Nance! You’ve beat ’em all. Don’t I wish I could see you in a real circus jest once!”

“Perhaps you will,” said Nance, dismissing Nap with a slap, who was nosing around for more sweets, and loading up the snow-shovel with the split wood. “I’ll come back for you in a minute,” she said, pulling stoutly up the slope.

Miffins had made great progress with his crutch in these two months. He had grown so strong and hearty that, with a little help, he could hitch along very decently up hill and down. Back flew the white figure, and put one arm under Miffins’s arm.

“Rest once or twice on the way up,” she said, “and I’ll tell you when we get up under the pines.”





*"M*IFFINS THREW UP HIS STRAW HAT  
... IN HIS ECSTASY OF DELIGHT."







"Now, I want you to answer questions and not ask any, not one," she said, peremptorily, when they had seated themselves beneath the pines.

"'Tain't fair." Miffins rebelled at the idea.

"Yes, 'tis, this time; you'll see. What I want you to tell me is whether I ride as well as those girls in the circus?"

"Yer beat 'em all holler," said Miffins, positively, falling into his old speech in his excitement.

"When does the circus come to New York?"

Miffins thought a moment.

"'Long towards May 'n' September."

"What do those best riders get a month?"

"Yer mean fer pay?"

"Yes."

"I dunno; but I guess they get as much as a show girl I knew. She wuzn't but thirteen, but she got fifty dollars a month singin' 'n' dancin' at the Bowery."

"Fifty dollars! Oh, my, what a lot! Why, Dan only gets a hundred dollars a year and his board and clothes — mean enough, too, they are — like mine!" she said, scornfully.

"Well, Miffins, I've decided to join a circus," she went on, slowly and emphatically. "I've been thinking about it all summer, and there isn't any way out of this winter-trap I shall soon



be in, but that. I can support myself then, besides seeing something of the world." She looked straight at Miffins to see what effect her statement would have upon him.

Miffins's hat flew into the air again.

"My, but you're a brick, Nance," he said, admiringly, and he chuckled to himself, "She's a one-er."

"You needn't call me names, Miffins; attend now to what I say. You've got to help me off. I've planned it all, and you're the only one that'll know,—and you *mustn't* know, you understand. Now tell me how you get there."

The whispered conference lasted fully fifteen minutes, then Nance shivered. The sun had set, and she was chilly in the thin dress with its low neck and short sleeves.

"How'd yer get on yer togs?" said Miffins, as they heard Nap whinny, and knew Jacob had come up, as he had promised, to fetch Miffins home and bring down some sheep for the market.

"I dressed over in the bushes beyond the brakes. Sh!" and, laying one hand on the rail, over she flew, looking in the failing light like a great white butterfly settling to rest.

"Thet's cur'us," said Jacob, as he drove up with Ethan, and the jigger railed off into a sheep-pen. "I could er took my oath thet I saw one of them sheep jump the fence jes' a few



minutes ago, as I came out of the woods. But you wuz right here, warn't yer? "

" Yes, I ain't seen any," said Miffins, innocently; " I'll go with you 'n' help drive 'em in."

" All right, sonny, ye're gittin' to be my right-han' man, better'n most on 'em with whole legs. Guess I'll lead Nap down by the halter; he needs lookin' arter. You drive," he added, after they had penned the sheep in the jigger.

" I dunno, marm," he said that night, as they sat at the supper-table. " I dunno what hez got inter thet colt! The sperits seem all gone outer him. He follows me roun' like 'n old cart-horse, 'n' two, three times I found him wet with sweat, 'n' a lather 'nuff ter shave with on his neck. I've brought him down ter the home paster ter see ef he can't git some of his frisk back. I hate ter see a colt peter-out like thet. Three months ago, he wouldn't come nigh me with a halter in my han', 'n' now he comes up so imperdent-like, 'n' sticks his nose into it! Durn me, ef I know what ter make er sech tantrums. Ef he wuz a mare now, I might — "

" There, there, Jacob," said Martha, mildly, " you've said enough."

" Don't be techy, marm," replied Jacob, a little testily, " I ain't said nothin' agin women; I only said ef Nap wuz a mare — "



Martha interrupted Jacob with a kindly laugh. "Come now, father, you'll spoil your supper frettin' over that colt; 'tain't worth it."

"Mebbe ye're right, marm," said Jacob, laughing at his little display of temper.



## CHAPTER VI.

### *Black Bear Cave*

JIM LEONARD, the minister's son, and the two Slocum boys, Harry and Billy, had decided to make the acquaintance of the new boy at Mr. Foss's. The fact that he was from New York whetted their curiosity.

The blackberries were thick in the back pasture, and Jacob had given the village children permission to pick all they would there. Consequently, it was no unusual thing for the three boys to drive up to the Roost in Lawyer Slocum's old farm wagon, and tell Jacob they were going up into the back pasture.

They made their appearance one morning in August, with their six-quart pails for berries and their one-quart pails for lunch.

Miffins was on the porch feeding Fidget, who growled a puppy growl at the boys as they approached, and then gambolled forth to meet them with every sign of welcome.

These three boys were a pleasing sight to



Miffins. Say what we may, a boy feels most at home with his own kind. A girl fills in well when no boys are to be had, but she can't take their place. Jack-knives and hockey and football can be talked over most intelligently with a girl — we all know that — but they can't be *fought* over with her.

Then there is stick-board and leap-frog, which are a bit beyond their comprehension, and a boy can't help feeling his superiority in these things. So, although Miffins had Nance to thank for many a happy hour in the back pasture, he was beginning to get homesick for boys, and Jim and Harry and Billy were just in time to divert his thoughts from his "pals" in New York. Martha was willing enough that he should join them, and provided him with a solid lunch.

"I say, fellers," said Billy, after they had picked steadily with little talk for two hours, "let's have our dinner down on the ledge. We can drive down to the fence, and then we can hoist Miffins over an' carry him down the slope basket-fashion."

"That'll be bully," said Jim, and off they went on their two-mile drive.

The East Branch rushes down a narrow valley. In its upper course it flows through Barnet Lake, that lies at the eastern end of the valley, and it empties into the Winooski at Barnet.



The valley toward the east is properly a long ravine with precipitous sides, two and three hundred feet high. The waters of the Branch are crowded between the banks and sweep with tremendous force over Beaver Dam, a natural barrier half-way between the lake and Barnet.

At the western end of the valley, the banks diminish in height, the valley widens to form meadows and flats, and the Branch flows steadily and quietly, almost level with the meadows on which lies the village of Hurdyville.

It was on the rocky wall just above Beaver Dam that the boys proposed to have their dinner, a wild spot, formerly the resort of bear and wolf, but long since made safe by the pioneers' shotguns.

They were eating their lunch with the keen appetite that belongs to boys, when Jim gave a shout.

"Jiminy! there's Fidget over the bank!"

Sure enough, the puppy, who had followed them to the pasture, and been brought for safe keeping with them in the wagon, had been investigating a mysterious hole at the very edge of the bank. Nosing about it, he had been all unaware of its occupant—a fine baby hedgehog that came suddenly into view in such an alarming state of excitement that Fidget, startled by the apparition, sprang backward and rolled over the edge of the embankment.

L. of C.



Yelping, rolling, sliding, slipping, the puppy made his way all too rapidly for his comfort toward the waters of the dam, and the boys were powerless to help.

Miffins had a bad five minutes waiting for the end, when, suddenly, all sounds ceased. The boys looked anxiously at each other, but the spruce and hemlock were too thick to allow them to see what had happened below.

They were under a huge beech which grew directly on the edge of the embankment. One great limb — an ordinary tree-trunk in itself — stretched at right angles over the bank.

“If I could crawl out on that,” said Harry, “I could see clear of the spruces and underbrush, and find out what’s become of him.”

Miffins felt like cursing his shrunken limb; but he looked unutterable encouragement at Harry.

“I’ll crawl out with you,” said Jim; “it’s a pretty ticklish place, for if you drop, you don’t touch bottom till you strike Beaver Dam. They say it’s as much as three hundred feet down, just here.”

“All right,” said Harry, and up went the two boys. Billy and Miffins watched breathless.

Slowly Harry made his way out on the branch, lying flat upon it, and hugging it with both arms; inch by inch he crawled out ten — fifteen feet,



then he was lost to sight. Jim followed him; he too disappeared.

"Hullo!" cried Billy, growing afraid for Harry.

"Hullo yourself!" came back the answer.

"What d'yer see?" said Miffins.

"By cracky!" shouted Jim, "this is worth coming for."

"Can yer see my dog?" cried Miffins.

"Yes," Harry called back, excitedly, "he's nosing around on a broad ledge of rock just about twenty feet below us, where he's landed safe and sound. Now he's gone into the rock!"

"Inter the rock! What yer givin' us?" shouted Miffins, troubled for his dog.

"Just what I say," yelled Harry. "I say, fellers, I'm coming back and going down the bank to see what's there. Back off, Jim — easy."

"All right," said Jim, proceeding even more cautiously than before, and in a few minutes both boys stood under the beech, with only their trousers the worse for wear.

"What d'yer see?" cried both the other boys.

Both Jim and Harry talked at once:

"I saw a great broad rock," said Jim. "And the Branch a-roaring over the dam," put in Harry. "And another rock rising right up from the broad one, and —" "And Fidget had found something, he came out of the rock —"



“And there’s plenty of room for twenty people to stand on right over the river —” “And there must be a big cave down there —”

“I say, let’s go down now,” proposed Billy, who, like Fidget, was longing to investigate. “We’ll leave you here, Miffins, and we’ll bring your dog up with us.”

Miffins heard the shouts as the boys swung themselves down the steep bank; then there was silence. Again he heard their voices, and soon they were scrambling and hoisting themselves up the ledge as best they could, bringing Fidget with them.

“We’ve found a cave,” they shouted as soon as they had regained breath, “a double one!”

“I think it was a bear’s cave once,” said Jim.

“Let’s call it Black Bear Cave,” chimed in Billy.

“That sounds like ‘Jack the Pirate,’” said Miffins.

“Who’s he?” asked the boys.

“Oh, I read ’bout him in a book — my pal let me have it — ’n’ there wuz ’nother, ‘The Freebooters;’ they lived in a cave ’n’ got their grub ’n’ things from other folks. They lived in a cliff, too. S’posin’ we play ‘Freebooters,’ ’n’ get our grub ’n’ live in the cave.”

The boys agreed it would be great sport.

“And we can shoot things, and hang the skins



in the cave," said Jim, who was already a crack marksman, and the proud possessor of a rifle.

"But how'll we get you down there?" Billy asked Miffins.

"I've thought er that; in the 'Freebooters' the kids were lowered down the side of the cliff in er cage. If I could get some kind of er basket 'n' er rope, perhaps we could fetch it."

"Oh, bully!" cried Billy, "we can get a clothes-basket —"

"And straps and a halter'll do it," interrupted Harry. "I know where I can *borrow* some," he added, slyly.

Miffins chuckled. "Ther'll be er lot er borrowin' 'fore we get through; but mind yer — ther ain't no peachin' in this crowd," he added threateningly.

"Not by a long shot," said Jim, emphatically. "We'll have a regular swearing in for every freebooter, and death to the one that peaches!" he exclaimed, quite tragically.

"I wish Seth could come," said Billy.

"Who's he?" inquired Miffins.

"Deacon Simms's boy that's living with him this year. He told me once he wanted to be a pirate."

"Won't he peach?" asked Miffins, suspiciously.

"Not if he takes the oath," Jim replied with an important air. "Can't we get the books,



Miffins? If we could read them, we'd know just how to go to work to have the real thing."

"Yup, I'll stan' treat this time." Miffins made the generous offer on the strength of his silver bits. "I'll send ter a newstan' I know of 'n' they can come by mail."

"But they mustn't come in your name or ours, or we'll be hauled up," said Jim, anxiously.

"I'll fix that," replied Miffins. "Nance Liscom'll send fer 'em, 'n' they can come ter her."

"But she's a girl, an' girls tell." Billy was fearful.

"Most girls would, but yer may bet yer life Nance won't. I know her." Miffins's faith reassured the boys.

Nance was commissioned at the earliest opportunity to send for the books, a commission she undertook with alacrity, promising on her word of honor not to tell.

Martha wondered that the boys should be so eager in the hot August weather to go black-berrying — little dreaming that the blacklegs were far thicker than the berries as the days went on, and that, up under the pines, four boys — for Seth had taken the oath — were listening to wild, blood-curdling tales of pirates and free-booters, and hair-raising, goose-flesh-producing stories of New York detective life.

Miffins was reader, and the adventures of Jack



the Pirate and his ilk lost nothing when rendered by him, and elucidated by his own experiences in the great metropolis.

When it came to putting their freebooting and piratical intentions into action, they went about it with such secretiveness that it was a wonder they did not betray themselves.

Nance had begged to be allowed to see the cave, but this was denied her.

“ ’Tain’t fer girls,” Miffins said, rather loftily, and with that Nance was obliged to be satisfied.



## CHAPTER VII.

### *Flight*

THE villages of Barnet and Hurdyville had a sensation. Nance Liscom had run away.

Jacob had driven down to the station that afternoon late in September, and brought the news home with him. He drove straight to the barn, and finished his chores before coming in. It was a cold night, the air keen and frosty. He stepped into the woodshed to bring in an extra armful of wood.

As he entered, Martha missed the usual cheery greeting.

"Well, father, ain't you ruther long gittin' in? You've been gone a long time. Why!" she exclaimed in alarm, as she went up to him and laid her hand lovingly on his shoulder, "don't you feel well, Jacob?"

"Yes, marm, yes, I feel well enough in my body, but I'm clean down in sperits."

"Why, Jacob, do tell, what is it?" questioned Martha, anxiously.



“Nance Liscom’s run away, ’n’ nobody knows where to look fer the gal.”

Martha threw up her hands in horror. “Oh, Jacob, you don’t mean it!” was all she could say at first. Then, as the tears gathered in her eyes, she wiped them away with the corner of her apron.

“Set up, father, do, ’n’ have your supper. You can talk while you’re eatin’.”

Jacob pulled his chair up to the table, but waited a minute for Miffins, who was busying himself with some late-hatched chickens by the kitchen stove.

“Come, sonny, come,” he said. “You’ll want ter hear, fer Nance wuz er good friend o’ yourn.”

Miffins took his seat, and busied himself with his baked potato.

“Here, take your tea first, father,” said Martha. “How’d you hear of it?”

Jacob gulped down half the contents of his cup, and passed it over to be filled again.

“Why, Ezra Slocum was drawin’ wood ter Mis’ Liscom’s this forenoon, ’n’ she asked him ef he’d see Nance anywheres on the road ’twixt their place ’n’ Reuben’s. She said she’n’ Dan’d been er lookin’ fer her everywhere sence breakfast, coz she wanted her to help in some rug-weaving. Ezra hadn’t seen anything of her, but that wasn’t nothin’ strange, coz she oftener’n not



takes the hill road 'n' over our back paster. Yer didn't see nothin' of her, did yer, sonny?" said Jacob, interrupting his story to look sharply at Miffins.

"No, I ain't seen her for a week," the boy replied, without looking up from his plate.

"Wal, Mis' Liscom was madder'n er hornet, 'n' sent Dan over to Reuben's to see ef she wuz there. But they hadn't seen her fer a week, 'n' Reuben had one of his poor spells 'n' got all upsot worritin'."

"Hadn't anybody seen her in the village?" asked Martha.

"No, not er soul, 'n' the curus part of it is thet 'long 'bout noon, jest ez soon ez Dan got back, 'long come a telegram from Montpelier—"

"Montpelier!" exclaimed Martha, "how in creation could she get to Montpelier by noon?"

"Wal," continued Jacob, "thet's the dum-foundedest part of the hull on't. It 'pears thet Seth Dyke, thet drives the late mail-stage over the mountin, wuz stopped by a woman on the Creek Road who give him 'n envelope 'n' er quarter, 'n' sez she, 'You pass this on ter the man ez drives the stage to Montpelier 'n' ask him to send this telegram from there ez quick ez he can.'"

"Well, this beats all!" said Martha. "Here, father, you ain't eatin' a mite er supper."



"I can't, Marthy, I can't," he said, pushing his plate aside. "I can't eat er thinking er that poor gal all sole alone er goin' perhaps to ruin."

"Come now, father!" comforted Martha, "we won't think it's er goin' ter be as bad as *that* —"

"Wait till I tell yer," said Jacob. "Wal, ez I said, 'bout noon come a telegram to Mis' Liscom. 'I've gone to join a circus, 'n' you needn't look fer me.' Now what d'yer think er thet?" said Jacob, bringing his fist down on the table till the dishes clattered.

"That's awful!" said Martha, in a frightened voice. "Oh, Jacob, you don't think she's been led away, do you?"

"The Lord knows," replied Jacob, solemnly. "It's bad 'nuff fer an innercent gal to go inter them cities alone — but ter jine a circus! — Marthy," he said, with trembling voice, "I've allus wanted a gal 'er my own to call me father, but if I'd had four, I'd ruther seen 'em all er lyin' where our boy lies ter-night, than know one on 'em had jined a circus."

"So'd I, Jacob," said Martha, the tears overflowing.

"What can they do? What can be done?" cried Martha, wringing her hands in her distress.

Miffins could bear no more. He knew he should have to leave the room or speak. He put



on as bold a face as he could, and, hitching over to the stove, busied himself again with the chickens, while he said in a voice that sounded queer in spite of himself:

"I think they're er makin' a big row 'bout nothin'. I'll bet it's one er Nance's tricks."

"Yer do, do yer?" roared Jacob. "Wal, ye'll know more when ye're older. I s'pose yer think coz ye come from that Sodom 'n' Gomorrah old town o' yourn, yer could teach yer betters — hey? Now, look er here," — he strode over to Miffins, and, seizing him by the arm, forced him into the lamplight, — "yer've got nothin' ter say about it; it's *my* say this time; now, mark my words, ef I knew the man who had influenced thet motherless 'n' fatherless girl ter run away ter jine a circus, I'd take that shotgun right down from the rack up there, 'n' load it with the biggest buckshot I could find, 'n' never rest till I'd peppered his durned hide with it — I *would*! Now yer know what sort of er man yer've got ter deal with once 'n' fer all."

Jacob had roared his righteous indignation out, and Miffins hitched away to the woodshed, glad to escape those flashing eyes.

"Jacob, Jacob," Martha said, appeasingly, "you're too hard on the boy; he ain't to blame for thinkin' ez he does. You fergit he hain't had no bringin' up."



"Wal — 'twill be er lesson ter him anyway. I can't sleep till I know all ther is ter know," said Jacob. "I'm goin' ter harness up agin, 'n' go down ter see if they've got track er her yit."

"Nor I nuther," said Martha. "I'll set up for you."

In a few minutes, Miffins heard the light farm wagon rattling down the hill. Then he returned to the kitchen. He didn't feel comfortable — but he said to himself they were making "no end of a row about it," and went early to bed hugging that thought.

But once in his bed he began to think differently. Where *was* Nance now? Just about getting into the Grand Central Station, and he was safe in bed! Suddenly the remembrance of other nights came to him, when he had stood outside that same station, shivering with cold and blowing on his numb fingers, ready to post a letter for a man, carry his bag, or sell him a paper, for the sake of an extra cent. He remembered the nights he had hung around the lunch wagons at twelve and one o'clock just to smell the hot coffee, before he sought shelter in the newsboys' lodgings. And he had known the great city — and he was a boy! And Nance was a girl, and had never seen such a thing as a trolley.

His own leg was twinging with the sudden cold snap. And just as it gave a mighty twinge,



he thought of the trolleys, and all the black horror of that moment came over him, when he felt himself go under — the horrible wrench and strain, as if body and soul were rent in twain, and the moment afterward, when he rolled from beneath, and shrieked as he looked up at a horse's hoofs, just ready to plant themselves on his breast.

And Nance! Nance was a girl, and didn't know anything about trolleys — he hadn't thought to warn her about anything, she was so fearless. But now — what if *she* should go under! A cold sweat broke out over his whole body; cold chills ran over him. He sat up in bed, and listened for some sound. He heard only the fire crackling in the kitchen stove, for Martha had put on fresh fuel to keep the room warm against Jacob's return.

Did Jacob suspect him? Would he put that buckshot into *him* if he knew?

These were some of his thoughts; and a thousand more coursed through his mind as he lay in the warm feather bed, and shivered with a horror unknown to him before. Twice he got out of bed to tell Martha that Nance was by this time at the Grand Central Station in New York; and twice, fearing the consequences, and remembering his promise to Nance not to tell if they branded him with a hot poker like the calves, he crept back again.



The kitchen clock struck rapidly, twelve, and from the best room across the passage, the old eight-day clock answered it with twelve solemn strokes. Miffins caught a faint clatter of hoofs on the road. Jacob was coming.

Martha heard it too; she hastened to the kitchen door, and as Jacob drove into the yard, she called out: "Have they heard?"

"Yes, marm," Jacob's voice sounded cheerily again through the night. "They've got er telegram sayin' she's in New York 'n' all safe, will be ter home ter-morrer."

"Thank God," said Martha Foss, and Miffins, not knowing what he was saying, repeated for the first time in his life, "Thank God," and went to sleep.

While every inhabitant of Barnet and Hurdyville was discussing the how and where and why of Nancy Liscom's disappearance, and many a good woman with girls of her own shook her head, and declared she always knew Squire Liscom's girl would come to grief, she'd set herself so above other folks, Nance was faring southwards toward the city of her dreams.

She and Miffins had planned it all up under the pines after the last rehearsal, and she followed out the program of departure to the letter. She had written the telegram herself, and ridden to the house over the mountain,



where she had delivered it to a small boy, bidding him to tell his mother that a neighbor had sent it, and it must go to Montpelier by stage that night. After breakfast, she had taken an old valise of her father's, and filled it with her scant wardrobe, some gingerbread cookies, a few early apples, her "circus" gown of cheese-cloth, her stockings and cloth sandals. Into the waist of her dress she pinned the twenty dollars which were her very own, and waiting for her opportunity, slipped from the house when Mrs. Liscom and Dan were busy in the garret getting ready her grandmother's loom for rag-carpet weaving. She took the short two-mile cut through the woods and along the railroad embankment to the station, and waited by the trestlework bridge just below the railway company's woodshed. When she heard the whistle of the approaching ten o'clock express, she ran along the embankment on the farther side of the station where no houses could overlook her, and, keeping close to the rear of the train as it passed her and drew slowly to the station, swung herself on to the rear platform and sat down in the end seat. Not till the train was off, and she had made sure that no village acquaintance was in the car, did she draw a free breath. She paid her fare, eight dollars, with the apology that she had had no time to get her ticket. Then she began to enjoy herself.



With every mile that the iron horse put between her and her native village her spirits rose. Every mile was bringing her nearer to her longed-for goal.

When twilight fell and the train steamed out of New Haven, her excitement was intense; in three hours she would be *there!*

She bought a New York paper, and, following Miffins's directions, looked for the advertisement of a circus or show. Sure enough, she found it! In great headlines:

“T O - N I G H T ! !

SWANE'S CIRCUS

FAMOUS BAREBACK RIDERS!

MILLES. DESIREE AND ROSALIE IN  
THEIR WORLD-RENOWNED FEATS.

GREAT TRAPEZE ACT BY DILKE  
BROTHERS

Performance begins promptly at 8.30. Boxes  
for sale; Centre Garden, the Bowery.”

Nance's heart throbbed quickly as she read. She could scarcely wait for the arrival of the train due at the Grand Central Station at 7.30. Miffins had told her about the approach to the great metropolis, and, pressing her face against the pane, she looked down the interminable lines of lighted streets until the tunnel shut out the



brilliant sight, and the slowing up of the train and the uneasy movements of the passengers told her she was *there* — at last!

“Don’t have nothin’ ter do with the perlice,” cautioned Miffins. “Them fellers as has blue coats ’n’ brass buttons ’ll swipe yer up, if they find out yer alone, ’n’ snake yer off ter some ‘home,’ where they’ll make yer wipe dishes for yer grub.”

That was enough for Nance, and as she passed, one of the great, indifferent crowd of travellers, up the platform toward the waiting-room, she kept a sharp lookout for “blue coats and brass buttons.” Sure enough, at the end of the platform she saw several, and, dodging past them, she followed the crowd that streamed toward a great central door. Before she knew it, she was on the street, dazed with the deafening rattle and roar, the shouts of the cabmen, the rapid, sharp clang of the trolleys. She was evidently in the way, for she was hit and jostled and nearly fallen over by the hurrying throng. Turning from the glare of an electric light, she saw a burly form in blue coat and brass buttons loom before her. Like a startled fawn, she started to flee — whither she did not know — and bump! she would have been knocked over by the sudden impact, had not a strong arm caught her on the rebound.



"I beg your pardon, are you hurt?" said a man's voice, and a gloved hand straightened the old-fashioned felt hat that the contact had knocked over her eyes.

Nance was dazed by the shock. It had flung the valise out of her hand, and, in looking around for it, she was aware that her arm was still in a strong grasp. She looked up — the big policeman was a reality; it was *he* who held her fast by the left arm.

"Oh! oh!" cried Nance in her misery of terror, for the "home" and the "dish-washing" loomed large in her imagination. Her face lost all its color, and her great eyes sought wildly around her for deliverance.

"I'm terribly afraid you're hurt," said the voice that had spoken before.

Nance turned toward that voice for help, at the same time trying to wrench herself free from the bluecoat's grasp.

"Easy — easy," said another voice, gruff, but not unkind. "If I let you go you might run, so I'm just holding on to you for safety. Girls ain't generally afraid of me."

"No, no, I won't run," cried Nance, catching her breath with a frightened sob, for she was only a girl, "if only you won't take me to the home — oh, please don't!"

"Look here," said the other voice, "I've got



this child into this scrape by not minding where I was going — supposing, sir, you let me get her out of it?" Nance saw the gloved hand present a card to the policeman.

"That's all right, sir, — glad to meet you," said the policeman. "Anything I can do for you on my beat, just let me know."

"Thanks," said the other, "I may need your help before long. Good evening," and the gloved hand met the big policeman's, as Nance could see, in a cordial clasp. The policeman released his hold on Nance and turned away, scattering as he did so a little crowd that was beginning to gather about the group.

"Come with me into the waiting-room a moment, and let's see what the damage is," said the kindly voice, and Nance clasped her rescuer's arm with a clutch which rivalled the policeman's.

The man smiled to himself. "Poor thing," he muttered, and strode up the steps with the valise in one hand and Nance clinging desperately to his right arm.

"Here, sit down here for a few minutes, and then perhaps I can escort you to your address," he said, courteously. "It's hardly safe" ("for a child" he was going to say; but just then Nance raised her eyes to her preserver's face, and he finished) "for a young girl to come alone into a strange city. Are you sure I didn't hurt you?"



"Not a bit," and Nance's pretty smile came out like a burst of sunshine from a cloud, "but I fear I broke your eye-glasses. See!" she said, "the frame is empty."

"You did, indeed," laughed the man, "and I shall have to depend upon your eyes a bit in taking you home."

Again Nance lost all her color, and her startled eyes sought the young man's, for he was both young and very good-looking, as Nance had seen with that first look.

"Oh, don't, please don't — anything but that!" she pleaded, clasping her hands in entreaty. "I've come to see the circus, and I've waited so long I should" — a sob — "I should *die*, if I didn't see it now when I'm so near!"

"The circus!" exclaimed the young man under his breath, but aloud, "You've come to see the circus at this time of night, and alone?"

"Yes, all the way from Vermont — I won't tell you where from, unless you promise not to send me home. If you try to do *that*," — the girl drew herself up and became all dignity so suddenly that John Anstey was startled, — "I'll run away from *you* the first chance I get!"

John Anstey thought very hard for a minute, then he saw his line of action with this unaccountable, but, to him, fascinating girl in her old-fashioned dress and her old-fashioned hat, with



her manners that were neither old-fashioned nor new-fashioned, but simple and childlike, dignified and womanly almost in one and the same moment.

Apparently he paid no attention to Nance's threat, somewhat to her amazement, but, thrusting his hand into his breast pocket, took out a card and handed it to her.

"Permit me," he said, with grave courtesy, "to make myself known to you. I am John Anstey, at your service."

Nance took the card and read it.

"MR. JOHN ANSTEY,  
ooo Fifth Avenue."

"Why!" she exclaimed, with a beaming smile, "how nice! That's near where my cousins live." She hoisted the valise to the seat, before the man was aware of what she was doing, opened it, and, rummaging about with one hand, brought forth a lot of visiting-cards.

"There!" she exclaimed to the amazed young man, "now we can compare notes," and she thrust them into his hand.

"They're not all my cousins, you know, but the Mr. and Mrs. are, and one of the young ladies. I've seen them all, but I don't know them."

And John Anstey read — read the eight well-known names of his own and his mother's set, all living within a few blocks of him.



"Were you going there?" he asked.

"Oh, no — not yet! Not till I had distinguished myself," said Nance, calmly.

Anstey suppressed a smile.

"Would you mind telling me how you intend to distinguish yourself?" he asked, deferentially, and Nance was enough of a girl to feel the charm of manner.

"Not in the least," replied Nance with equal courtesy. "But it mightn't interest you?" she added, with a searching look.

The man bore it well.

"It would interest me more than I can say," he hastened to assure her, "especially as I am well acquainted with your cousins, and know their friends."

"Well, then, I'll tell you. I am going to join a circus, and become a famous bareback-rider. I've practised ever so long, and ever since I was so high, I've just yearned" (words fail to convey Nance's passionate emphasis of that word) "to see a circus."

John Anstey took out his handkerchief suddenly and smothered a cough. It was the most diplomatic thing to do at that important moment.

"Have you made — er — any engagement?" he asked, after his spasm of coughing.

"Oh, no, not yet. That's what I've come down for. I'm going to-night."

"To-night?"



"Yes, and it must be about time to go," said Nance, suddenly recollecting that she was due at that performance in the Bowery at 8.30.

The young man hesitated. He could not risk failure at this stage of proceedings. He must feel his way.

"Would you kindly tell me your name?"

"Certainly," she laughed. "I somehow took it for granted you knew. I am Nancy Liscom; my father was Squire Liscom of Barnet — There!" she cried, with a merry laugh, "I've told without meaning to — but you won't send me home!" she pleaded, with all the charm of her sweet voice.

"No, I won't *send* you home," he answered her, gravely, "but I should esteem it a favor if you would tell me if your parents knew you were coming here — to see the circus."

"No," — she looked up into his face with truth-telling eyes, — "no, my parents didn't know I was coming, for I haven't any; they're dead. I ran away from my stepmother."

Something dimmed Anstey's eyes just then. When he next spoke, it was in a still graver tone.

"I'm very sorry for you, Nancy, sorry that you have no parents, and sorry you had to run away from any one. Did no one know of your coming?"



"No one but Miffins."

"Who is Miffins?"

"He's a crippled newsboy that came from New York to live with Mr. and Mrs. Foss. He and I planned it all together, and he promised not to tell. He showed me how to do the circus feats, the hurdles and hoops."

The man was completely mystified.

"Nancy," he said, quietly, "I'd like to go with you to the circus this evening. I could, perhaps, be helpful to you in showing you the way and getting your tickets, — and after that is over, where shall I take you?"

"Why, I don't know exactly," said Nance. "I thought — I thought perhaps, after they had seen me ride, they'd take me in, and I could sleep in the tent with the other girls."

"Good God!" the exclamation escaped Anstey before he knew it.

Nance looked frightened. "What have I said?" she demanded.

"Pardon me, Nancy, I had a little sister once, your age, I judge, and I was thinking of her. If you don't care to make your engagement with the circus just to-night, perhaps it would be better to be my mother's guest."

"Well, I think it would," replied Nance, with a sigh of relief. "But if we don't hurry, we shall be late — we are late now!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "Oh, do let's be going."



“But first I must telephone to my mother; she is expecting me to dinner.” He stepped to the telephone office, leaving Nance on the seat.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### *The Circus in the Bowery*

“MR. JOHN is telephoning,” said the butler in a low voice to Mrs. Anstey, as she sat at her exquisitely appointed dinner-table, entertaining her guests.

“Answer for me, Joseph,” she said, quietly. The butler disappeared, only to emerge in a moment from the pantry, and whisper again:

“Mr. John says he must speak with you privately, ma’am.”

“Very well, tell him I’ll come.”

She excused herself to her guests, and placed herself at the telephone.

“Is that you, mother?”

“Yes, John. Why *aren’t* you at home? It’s broken up the whole dinner.”

“Can’t help it this time, mother. I’m off for the evening on a little mission work of my own.”

“Oh, John — but just to-night.”

“Yes, I know, mother, — but I’ll tell you all about it to-night when I come in. I sha’n’t be



in till late, and I wish you'd sit up for me — get the others to bed if you can — and, mother — ”

“ Yes.”

“ Just have that upper hall-bedroom ready for a guest to-night, will you? ”

“ Yes, of course I will, dear. One of *His* guests? ”

“ Yes, I see you understand. It's a girl — about fifteen — this time. A newsboy's protégée.”

“ What will come next, John? ”

“ I don't know, mother — ‘ me and the girl,’ I hope. Good-night.”

“ Oh, John! ”

And the telephone rang down.

“ Now, Nancy,” he said, as he returned to the girl, “ we'll send this valise on ahead. If you should need it for any engagement, it can easily be brought down to us. But I can't enjoy the circus thinking that people are looking for you away off there in Vermont. There must be some one who would worry about you. Think! ”

“ Why, yes,” said Nance, thoughtfully, “ dear old Dan would, and Uncle Reuben — and Aunt Liscom, and Mr. and Mrs. Foss — and — and — well, I suppose Mrs. Liscom would like to know where I am; perhaps they might worry just a little. I didn't think of Uncle Reuben — he is ill — ”

“ Then I think you ought to think of him, and



you have no right to enjoy your evening while others are distressed about you. Now I want you to do *me* a favor."

"What is it?" said Nance, on her guard.

"I want you to let me telegraph Mrs. Liscom that you're here, and safe to-night with my mother. Then I shall enjoy my evening."

"I suppose I ought to," said Nance, reluctantly, "but I wish you would telegraph to Dan instead."

"No, Nancy, I shall telegraph to Mrs. Liscom; it's her right to know."

"Well, do as you please," said Nancy, airily, and John Anstey felt actually grateful to her. This was the telegram that sent Jacob Foss light-hearted homeward at midnight, and caused Martha, his wife, to thank God.

"NEW YORK, Grand Central Station, 8.15 P. M.

"TO MRS. JAMES LISCOM, Barnet, Vermont.

"Nancy is safe, and will spend the night in my home in my care. She returns to-morrow. I am a friend of her cousin, Mrs. Barnard.

"ELIZABETH ANSTEY,  
ooo Fifth Avenue."

By the time the telegram was sent, Nance's impatience was plainly visible. As they went out into the street again, more than one turned to look at the odd couple. The girl never knew how



she got to Centre Garden, for John Anstey helped her into a cab, and, jumping in himself, bade the man drive to the Bowery.

“Call for you, sir?”

“Yes, half-past ten,” said Anstey, and the two got out at the entrance to the garden, which was blazing with a thousand colored lights. From within the entrance corridor, came a burst of music — such as it was — and Nance’s eyes shone.

For a moment, even John Anstey hesitated; then, setting his lips firmly, he said to himself:

“It *must* be; it’s either kill or cure to-night. I’ll save her if I can. — Keep close to me, Nancy.”

Nance looked up at the tone; it did not sound natural. Then she followed him in. He took a box, that the girl might be near the performers. While making the purchase, Nance kept close by him. She knew instinctively with her upbringing that the men and boys about her were not such as she should be with. There were loud guffaws — smoking, chewing — drinking already at a small bar at the farther end; they crowded and jostled. There was a cool breath as the baize doors opened to let them in, and a smell of fresh tan-bark and sawdust. The “garden,” or hall on the ground floor, was draped to imitate a tent, and lanterns and streamers gave color to the hangings.



Anstey had taken the box next the performers' entrance to the ring, so that every word of those "behind the scenes" was audible. A boy dressed in blue velvet coat and knee-breeches, and ruffled, soiled silk shirt, came to the box and handed up a tray of glasses filled with something dark — the very odor of which sickened Nance. She turned away her head in disgust. The band brayed in the pit beneath them.

Suddenly from within the entrance came the sound of a scuffle — then blows and curses. Nance turned an appealing look upon her companion.

"That's always the preliminary," he said, smilingly — "that's part of the program in a circus. I'll take you behind there later on, if you wish." He spoke with the utmost assurance and indifference.

Nance had no answer ready, for just then there was a double fortissimo burst of music — a wild clapping of hands, hoots, and catcalls, as the circus cavalcade leaped out from the draped entrance beneath the box. Nance held her breath.

How fine they looked at a distance! — and how unfine near to, as they cantered out almost within arm's reach of Nancy. The girl saw their white and red painted faces, their coarse harlequin suits, — none too clean, — the ghastly mask of the clown, the wizened, rouged faces of the



pages, boys and girls of her own age, the chattering, grinning monkeys as outriders, the gilt chariot with the statuesque group of girls — Nance turned away her head for shame — where were their clothes! For of tights she never had a suspicion; they were unknown to her. And the expression of the faces beneath the paint! Hard and set even in their smiles.

Anstey said to himself a dozen times, as he watched the girl's face, "I am cruel to do this. It would have been so much easier to keep up the illusion. But I must save her from her folly. God help me."

Then the performance began. But Nance cared little for the monkeys and trained dogs, for the clown and his jokes at which the house was in an uproar, nor for the trick-horses standing in pyramids, nor for the wonderful trapeze acts of the Dilke Brothers.

She was waiting for the bareback riders. At last!

She heard an oath beneath her, answered by another; then a voice — a woman's:

"I tell you I can't ride to-night. I'm faint."

"You shall ride." Then followed a brutal oath — the sound of a blow — and a woman's suppressed cry.

Nance turned to John Anstey, white and trembling. "Oh, take me out," she cried; "I can't



bear it. If she rides and is faint, she'll fall. You can't ride unless you feel sure of yourself. I know, because I've tried it."

"Hush, Nancy," said John Anstey. "It's nothing unusual." And Nancy waited, sick and trembling.

Had her ears deceived her? Out came the two riders, on exquisite cream-white horses, smiling, bowing, with garlands of artificial flowers in their hands, their dresses of glistening gauze flashing silver and gold in the electric lights, leaping, pirouetting, light as thistle-down on the backs of the superb animals. Round and round they went with ever-increasing speed, joining hands, separating, ever bowing and smiling. Up went the hurdles—over went the beautiful steeds. Up went the hoops—a burst of music—crash! they flew like darting humming-birds through the hoop. But as they passed beneath the box, Nance saw their heaving chests, caught the sound of the quickly drawn breath, saw the hollowed cheeks beneath the paint, saw, too, with her keen, practised eye, that one of the girls could ride but little farther.

She clutched Anstey's arm and whispered, "She's going to fall; she never can go through that hoop and light on the horse—I know she can't. Oh!"

Mlle. Rosalie had made one last effort to fly



through the hoop — and failed, missing both hoop and horse. She fell fainting in the ring. They bore her out quickly — and Nance burst into tears.

“Oh, take me away — take me away,” she cried, her voice almost drowned in the groans and hisses that went up from the benches.

“I think she’s had enough,” said the young man to himself, smiling grimly, and led her out by the hand, asking permission to pass out at the back entrance. His request, emphasized by a half-dollar, was granted, and as he drew Nance through the ill-assorted crowd, she caught one glimpse of a quiet figure that, lying unconscious in a dead faint on an old piece of carpet, still had painted roses on her cheeks.

It was a very miserable girl that sat beside John Anstey during the long four-mile drive from the Bowery to Fifth Avenue — a miserable, tired, hungry, and disheartened girl, who had had a day of unwonted excitement, who had had no dinner save the gingerbread and apples, whose castles in Spain had all tumbled about her ears, and who had the first headache of her life — the result of the smoke and noise and excitement and a day’s fast.

For awhile Anstey thought a good cry would do her good, but as the sobs decreased in quantity, they did not improve in quality; they



dwindled into a long-drawn breath and a little moan, which was more than John's tender masculine heart could bear.

"We'll soon be at home, Nancy," he assured her, cheerily, "and then my mother will put everything right."

"I don't think she can," moaned Nance.

"Why not?"

"My head feels so queer. Oh, dear!" — the sobs broke out in their natural key again, — "I wish I were at home!"

"Well, we'll see that you get there soon, Nancy. How does your head feel?"

"Just queer and hot and heavy."

A thought made the man start.

"Where did you get your lunch?"

"I had some gingerbread and apples with me."

"Where did you get your dinner?"

"I haven't had any." Nancy's voice was almost inaudible, but John Anstey heard it, and he himself almost had a qualm just at the thought of all that vile tobacco smoke and nothing to help sustain it.

"You poor child!" he exclaimed. "I've been a brute."

Nance looked up and actually smiled through her tears.

"You sha'n't call yourself names," she said; then after a moment's hesitation, she added,



gravely, "I think you have just the manners Saint George must have had."

Anstey, in the shadow of the cab-corner, blushed like a girl. He had never had a compliment which rang so true. But he turned it off with a laugh and a "Here we are! Now for mother and some lunch."

He let them in with his key.

"John, is that you?" a sweet voice called from the head of the stairs.

"Yes, mother, here we are. Come right up, Nancy."

Mrs. Anstey, stepping back into the library, wondered what she was about to see.

"Mother, this is Nancy Liscom, a cousin of the Barnards."

"My dear—girl" (child, she was about to say), "you are very welcome," and the sweet-voiced woman advanced to meet her with outstretched hands, and, taking the white face between them, kissed her forehead.

"I'm going to run down, mother, to see what is left over from dinner in the cold storage closet — for " — he smiled significantly at his mother — "neither Nancy nor I have had any dinner, and I'm hungry."

"Let me take your hat and jacket, my dear. Not any dinner! Why, how did that happen?"

Nancy's eyes filled with tears, and looking



straight into Mrs. Anstey's gentle blue ones, she said, with trembling voice:

"Would you mind, Mrs. Anstey, if I didn't talk about it now? I don't think I can bear it — and Mr. Anstey will tell you all about it."

"Of course he will, my dear. You're all tired out and need sleep — for I see you have a headache." She laid her hand gently on the crown of beautiful dark-red hair, and Nance felt better immediately for that one touch.

John Anstey came up with a loaded tray, and Nance felt more interest in life at the sight. Soon they were doing justice to the cold chicken and rolls, the currant jelly and tongue sandwiches. While the two ate, and her son kept up, as well as he could between mouthfuls, a running fire of questions as to their guests and the dinner, Mrs. Anstey observed Nancy, who ate in silence.

She saw before her a tall girl, so graceful and well-shaped that even the ill-fitting serge dress could not conceal the comeliness; a fine-shaped head, with an abundance of heavy hair of a wonderful color, neither red nor brown nor golden, but something of all three, that hung in heavy loose curls to her waist; an oval face with a delicate, sensitive mouth, a pretty nose, and large, gray eyes that at that moment looked black because shaded by long, dark lashes.

"She would be a perfect beauty, but for the



freckles," was Mrs. Anstey's verdict. "I can't wait," she thought, "to get her up-stairs to bed that I may hear John's story — and the Barnards' cousin, too! I don't understand it."

"I'll take our guest in charge now, John," she said, when they had satisfied their hunger. "Come, my dear," and she held out her hand.

Nancy Liscom rose, and all her birthright as a gentlewoman, all her mother's grace and charm, all her father's careful instruction came to her aid at that moment. Before taking Mrs. Anstey's hand, she turned to her son, and holding out her own, said:

"Mr. Anstey, I understand now many things that were a mystery to me before I came to New York — and, not having a father or mother to do it for me, I want to thank you for saving me from what you have. Good-night."

Anstey could not speak at all. He pressed the hand held out so frankly to him, and just as the girl left the room with his mother, the great clock on the landing chimed twelve.

"Thank God," said the young man, reverently.

The next day, when Nancy Liscom arrived at Barnet on the six o'clock train, Dan met her at the station and drove her home in the friendly twilight.

Miffins did not see her for a week afterward, then he heard her bright voice at the kitchen door.



He was husking corn with Jacob in the barn, and kept steadily at his work. Jacob rose from the old splint-bottomed chair on which he was sitting.

"I'm goin' in ter see Nance. It sounds good ter hear her voice agin. Comin' long, sonny?"

"Bimeby," said Miffins, husking faster. The longer he waited, the harder it became to go into the house. Somehow he didn't feel like seeing Nance.

But Nance saved him the trouble. He heard a light step, and, looking up, saw her standing on the wharfing.

"You don't look very hospitable, Miffins. Don't you want me to pay you a visit?"

Miffins hardly knew what to say, and what he did say was anything but what he intended to:

"You back, Nance!"

Nancy's eyes flashed. "You *know* I'm back, Miffins Foss, as well as you know you're here; and you knew I *went* too!"

Miffins searched among the heap of corn husks for a small ear he had dropped. Suddenly Nance dropped upon the heap, effectually preventing further search, and crossing her legs à la Turque, leaned her elbows on her knees and her chin on her hands, looking straight at Miffins, till he was compelled to look at her.

"Now, then," she said, in a low voice, that



she might not be heard beyond the threshold, "I have a few words to say to you. I suppose you think I'm going to blame you for helping me off — and tell you how I got there, what I did, and why I came home the next day? Well, I'm not going to say one single word about it, so now! and you needn't ask me any questions, for you won't get any answer, nor will any one else, they may try till they're gray. But there is one thing I've got to say to you, and that's about myself, and that is I owe you an everlasting debt of gratitude for putting me up to what you did — and now find out if you can what I mean by it!" she exclaimed, triumphantly; leaping to her feet, and holding out her hand frankly, she added:

"There, now, shake hands, and let by-gones be by-gones. I was always a good friend of yours," — this quite condescendingly — "and you *didn't tell*."

"What d'you take me for, anyway?" growled Miffins, ignoring the proffered hand.

Nance laughed merrily. "For a boy that needs to be taught manners for one thing, and for another, a boy who is to be pitied for what he doesn't know about some things worth knowing!" And with this mysterious answer, of which Miffins thought many times in the future, she ran away to the house to chat with Martha Foss, whose curiosity also remained unsatisfied.



No one in the two villages of Barnet and Hurdyville knew anything definite of Nance's adventures during the forty-eight hours she was from home. The only fact that was known was, that she had come home, after some one had telegraphed to Mrs. Liscom, with a letter addressed to the latter; that the letter stated she had spent the night at a friend of her cousins, the Barnards, and she had been met at the station by a member of the family. More than this Jane Slocum Liscom could not know, for there was that about Nance after her return which forbade too close questioning. To one and all, even her uncle and aunt, she made the same answer, "I was entertained by a friend of my cousins. I prefer not to say anything more about it." Gradually the village people grew tired of asking her, and the affair became merely a nine days' matter of wonderment. But no one, save the four hill people and Dan, liked her the better for refusing to indulge their curiosity.



## CHAPTER IX.

### *The Freebooters*

IT was the most glorious month in the year — October. There seemed to be thirty-one days of golden sunshine and thirty-one nights of fine moonlight, and our Freebooters determined to make the most of it.

On the plea of butternutting and wood-pussy hunting, the Slocum boys or Jim Leonard were at the Roost every other day with the old farm wagon to carry off Miffins; and Jacob gave ready consent, for he was proud of the great improvement in the boy's looks and strength. He was so helpful, too, indoors, that Martha said he deserved to have this month for out-of-doors. "For the time's comin', father, when he'll have ter be penned up here with us old folks too much. 'Tain't ez if he could git out in the heavy storms like other boys."

Many a quart-pailful of appetizing dinner she put up for her boy on his "expeditions," from which he did not always return with



spoils, — mince pie and sage cheese, bread and butter and cold boiled beef, and a full pint of coffee in the lower compartment of the pail.

It was so easy for the boys to drive Miffins down to the Branch Road, and leave him there in the bushes, and then drive up to the edge of the butternut woods and tie the horse to the fence, while they ran back and, carrying Miffins on their crossed hands down the slope, lower him in the basket to Black Bear Cave.

The cave was growing to be a cosy place which any boy would have found fascinating.

Jim had manufactured a rude gun-rack, and hung it on the side of the outer cave. Billy Slocum had “borrowed,” so he termed it, a buffalo robe from Deacon Simms’s carriage-loft, and a few bushels of corn-husks made a fine under bed. This they made up in the inner cave, for the blockading of which they had a large, flat stone of slate, that had served somebody for the cover of a spring, and which, with great difficulty, they lowered on to the ledge. By combining their efforts, they could shove this before the inner opening.

Somebody’s meal-chest — Harry Slocum would not tell whose — was their provision closet, and held a goodly store of butternuts, cheese, apples, spruce gum, crackers, raisins, cigarettes, a few cigars, and a half-dozen bottles of “three per



cent.," a cheap beer that was sold at the one restaurant in Barnet and not to be touched by the law. On the ledge in front, and just outside of the outer cave, they had made a hearth of clay, hollowing it in the middle to hold coals, as Billy had read the South American Indians did when they resorted to their palm-leaf mattings in the trees in time of flood.

Within the cave, they had a fine pile of small hickory and birch, pine knots, and a store of birch bark. Two well-cured sheep-skins furnished the boys with mats.

The outer cave itself was dry and fairly warm when a good fire was kindled just outside the entrance. On the sides hung two fox-skins, soft as silk, three rabbit-skins, and eight squirrel-skins, their hunting trophies thus far.

The night they slept in the cave was one long remembered.

The boys had met the day before in the back pasture, whither Miffins had gone, by appointment, to salt the sheep. The colts and cattle had been brought down into the "home pasture."

Billy was blue, because he couldn't find a way to spend the night in their snug hiding-place. Harry had suggested a half-dozen plans in which Jim Leonard had found the weak points every time. Seth was beginning to hint about backing out, much to the other boys' disgust, because he



was afraid he would lose his place if the deacon found him out. Miffins came to the rescue.

“Tell yer what, fellers, there ain’t but jest one way.”

“What’s that?” chorused the boys.

“Yer’ve got ter whop it out.”

“What d’you mean?” said Jim. “Lie it out?”

“Yup, it’s easy ez winkin’. See?” And he winked so prodigiously that the boys shouted.

“I wish yer’d begin with me,” ventured Seth.

“Well, you’re the squeamiest; we’ll give you the easiest. You tell the deacon that Jacob Foss asked yer if you could come over ’n’ help me git the sheep down from the back pasture. He ain’t goin’ ter be ter home till night, fer he’s goin’ ter the fair; I can get ’em down well ’nuff myself — but you whop so; will yer?”

“But I don’t see how that’s er goin’ to git me off fer a night.”

“Yer bloomin’ idjut! Tell him yer can’t git home till after dark, so yer goin’ ter stay with me.”

“Oh!” said Seth, “but ef I stay with you, how’ll we git ter the cave with the rest of the boys?”

Miffins appealed to the boys. “I say, fellers, can’t yer knock daylight inter that bloomin’ —” But he didn’t finish the sentence, for Seth’s fist



fitted itself none too gently into Miffins's mouth and shut it up rather suddenly.

"You ain't er goin' ter call me no more names. I'm ez good ez you 'n' better, fer folks say you're a —" But neither was Seth allowed to finish his sentence, for three boys were on top of him in less than no time, and six hands were punching his head face downwards into the turf.

"Let up, fellers," cried Miffins, "he's had 'nuff," and he assisted the much-abused Seth into a sitting posture.

"Now, shut up, all of yer, till I tell yer what yer must do. Each of yer say he's goin' ter sleep at ernother feller's, 'n' that'll make it square all round."

So it was settled.

Billy's spirits rose at the prospect. Seth was to spend the night with Miffins, Miffins with Jim, Jim with Harry and Billy, and the last two were to have an invitation to their cousin Sam's on the North Branch Road.

"I've found a dark lantern in the garret," said Jim, "and I'll be there at six ready to light the rest, so you won't lose your bearings. I'll meet you, Miffins, at Cross Corners. I'll bring along the little go-cart to help you on from there."

"I'll give the countersign," said Billy, who was inventive; "we'll spell Miffins's name backwards and answer 'sniffim.'"



"We'd better meet 'bout seven, then we can have a longer night of it," suggested Harry.

"All right," said the boys, and they separated.

They were far more excited over the escapade than Miffins, and each, as he turned homewards, was thinking how he could get out of telling that lie. It didn't come easy to them, and when Jim Leonard followed his father out to the barn, he chose to be very busy with a halter in the stall, from the depths of which he asked:

"Say, father, Harry and Billy want me to spend the night with them; can I?"

"What's up?" said Parson Leonard.

"They want to go butternutting early the next day up in Mr. Liscom's wood-lot. There's two or three bushels up there."

"I don't mind if your mother doesn't; let her know before you go." Which was just what Jim hadn't the courage to do, so he left his father to tell her, and slipped away early about five, persuading himself that he had not lied, for Harry and Billy *did* want him to spend the night with them, and he would propose the butternutting expedition early on the morrow, so that part of the story might come true.

It was easy enough for Miffins to get permission from kindly Martha Foss.

"You're in good company with Parson Leonard's son, 'n' you can go early. Barzy's comin'



over ter help with the chores 'n' he'll take you as fur as Cross Corners, 'n' father'll come fer you in the mornin'. Father'll be home by nine, 'n' I stayed many a night alone on the hill 'fore you come. Be sure you have enough clothes on you to-night; boys kick round so you might lie half uncovered 'thout knowing it, 'n' it's goin' ter be a snappin' night." She stooped to kiss him — but Miffins shied, and Martha laughed, patting his head.

With Seth and the Slocum boys it fared hard. The deacon was naturally suspicious of everybody who was "hired help," and Seth came through the ordeal rather the worse for it. The deacon had lost his temper because Seth stumbled in his lie, and given him a sounding thwack on his ear before granting his request.

"Air yew growin' deaf?" he thundered, when Seth, rather than tell lie number two, did not answer him; and forthwith he proceeded to stimulate his hearing by a mighty cuff, which hurt Seth's pride more than his ear, and made him determine to run away from such a tyrant at the first opportunity that presented, and turn freebooter in reality, coming back in due time to plunder and burn the deacon's farm and buildings. But he got off at last.

Billy and Harry had their own trials; not of conscience, for it was not the first time they had



“whopped” to attend some “spree” in the village, but of a material kind. In their excitement, they neglected to do some of the “chores:” the wood-box was left empty, the brindle cow unmilked, and the second and third stall horses left without a shake-down of straw for bedding. All this their father discovered when they had been gone but twenty minutes, and, putting himself on his black mare, overtook them on the road (to their cousin’s!) and brought them back, one before and one behind him, to finish their work. In consequence, it was eight o’clock before Jim, who had been flashing his lantern at minute intervals for two hours, heard a rustling in the bushes above him, and called, “Who goes there?”

“Sniffim,” answered two well-known voices, and the late comers were received with a shout.

“Oh, but it’s bully!” they cried, as they dropped on to the ledge, and no wonder they thought so.

The boys had built a fine fire on the hearth, and the flames sent their dancing lights into the cave as far as the inner opening. Within they had spread their feast on the meal-chest — cheese and cold pie and doughnuts and apples; it was a royal supper! And they lay or sat on the sheepskins and kicked their heels — for they could not turn somersaults, the roof was too low —



and shouted for joy. They had no fear of being heard, for the Branch thundered over the dam below, and the fire crackled and snapped, and the air-bubbles burst with a report like small fire-arms. After the supper came the "small" beer and the cigarettes, and after the cigarettes, a cigar apiece — and Billy and Seth and Jim, who had never smoked one before, ceased to kick their heels, and lay suspiciously quiet, while Miffins and Harry geyed them to their hearts' content.

The effects passed off, however, before midnight, and what with smoke and beer, and the dizziness occasioned by both, they were all five bleary-eyed and sleepy by eleven o'clock.

The Freebooters were ready to turn in, but who should watch? No one offered, for each felt he could not keep his eyes open five minutes.

"We'll let the fire die down," said Miffins, "and just keep the coals a-goin'."

"I'll do the first watch," said Seth, "coz I'd like some more air. How much did yer pay fer that cigar of mine, Harry?"

"If I tell you, you'll feel worse; you go watch and think about it."

"I sha'n't watch but 'n hour," said Seth.

"All right," said Jim, "I'll take the next."

"'N' me next," said Miffins, and between them they divided the remaining hours of the night most satisfactorily.



They could not wait to "turn in." They crawled into the inner cave, spread the sheepskins over the corn-husks, and, lying "spoon-fashion," drew the buffalo robe close over and around them.

Miffins, lifting his head once, looked out through the opening, and saw Seth sitting with his back against the cave, his feet stretched to the fire, his eyes fixed before him.

The Freebooters were sound sleepers, but they all were roused by a heavy body tumbling in upon them. Eight arms and eight legs resented the intrusion, and inextricable confusion reigned in the darkness.

In the chaos, Seth's voice was scarcely audible. His teeth were chattering, and he clung first to a leg, then an arm — whichever happened to be uppermost.

"Strike a light. What time is it? What's up? Can't you speak? Get off of my leg."

"Sh-sh!" chattered Seth.

For a wonder, the boys obeyed, and carried on their conversation in whispers.

"Got a match, Billy?"

"Yes, here 'tis."

"Sh-sh," said Seth, "don't light up — it'll be here in a minute."

"Wot'll be here?" said Miffins. "Stop yer jaw-mill, 'n' tell us wot's up."



"I wuz watchin' —" he was interrupted by a smothered laugh from Jim — "I tell yew I wuz," he said, fiercely, below his breath, "'n' I heerd somethin' come pad, pad, paddin' down the bank over the ledge; it rustled 'n' rustled 'n' then stopped, 'n' then —"

"And then you fell in on top of us, and just as we —"

"Sh-sh! I hear it!" whispered Seth.

In spite of themselves, every boy's ear-drums were strained to the splitting point.

Sure enough! There it was! The "pad, pad, paddin'" above their heads. The moon had set, and the fire had died out.

Suddenly, there was a heavy thud, apparently just over the roof of the cave, then the sound of a large body scrambling down through the brush-wood.

The boys breathed heavily.

"Get yer gun, Jim," said Miffins, which was easier said than done, for Jim was at the bottom of the pile of boys, "'n' gimme the hatchet, 'n' Harry, you take my crutch."

The three boys disentangled themselves, and crawled out into the outer cave, where they lay close, scarcely daring to breathe. Jim's finger was on the trigger.

The great body made its way cautiously down the bank, slipping and sliding, and finally landed on the ledge.



"Don't fire till yer see his eyes, Jim," whispered Miffins, raising the hatchet.

For a minute, not a boy of them all breathed. "Sniff—sniff—pouf!" Then four eyes looked cautiously into the cave.

There was a deafening explosion; the cave was filled with the smell of powder. Seth had caught and thrown up Jim's arm just as he pulled the trigger.

"It's Tiger!" he shrieked; "the deacon'll kill me for not shuttin' him up."

It was Deacon Simms's great mastiff, who weighed easily one hundred and eighty pounds, and with him, as convoy, was Miffins's collie puppy, Fidget, who, like-minded as Tiger, had scented his master from the Roost to the cave.

"Oh, cracky, what ef yer'd shot him!" groaned Seth.

"Shut up, you blockhead!" roared Jim. "'Twould have been your own fault for getting scared of nothing. You went to sleep the first thing."

"I didn't," said Seth, stoutly. "I wuz awake most er my hour."

"Oh, oh!" jeered the boys.

"Wal, anyway, 'tain't fur from sunrise, 'n' I'm goin' ter hev some sleep; the dogs can watch now. I'm so stiff, I can't but jest move."

"Go to bed, granny," said Miffins, and they



bundled him into the little cave with Billy. "Let's build up the fire, boys."

They fell to work, and soon were warming their feet and hands at the hot blaze.

Tiger and Fidget stretched out on the ledge to leeward of the heat, and rested from their midnight labors.

When morning broke, the Freebooters could not break their fast, save with apples and raisins, — and the ice had formed on their water-bucket.

Billy shivered, and looked blue as indigo, and Seth groaned with every movement.

"Let's go home early, boys," said Jim, who was trying to invent a consistent lie to account for his early home-coming without butternuts.

"I'm feared Tiger'll scent that robe, 'n' the deacon'll find us out!" moaned Seth.

"Yer'd better be startin' early, then," said Miffins, "so'z ter get home 'n' chain him up."

Seth muttered something, and, calling Tiger, began to scramble up the bank.

"Hold on there!" cried Jim. "Don't you sneak off that way." But Seth only scrambled the faster, as if his stiffened joints had been suddenly oiled.

Miffins laughed. "Let him go; we'll pay him up 'fore we're through with him."

It was a hard pull for Miffins up the hill road. The boys had done their best, carrying him over



the rougher places, but he refused to let them help him after the highway was reached.

He set bravely to work to crutch it along the two miles, but he sat down oftener and oftener, as the hill grew steeper. The perspiration stood in beads on his forehead. His breath grew short; his leg ached terribly. He was sitting by the roadside, shivering in the crisp morning air, when he heard a wagon coming down the hill. It was Jacob Foss.

“Hello, sonny!” he called, cheerily, “yer’ve got ahead of me this time. I meant ter meet yer at Cross Corners; I reckoned you’d git ’bout that fur by this time. I knew yer’d come home ’fore breakfast. ’N’ Fidget followed yer, hey?”

But Miffins was too exhausted to answer.

“Well, I declare for’t, yer be used up! Guess home’s the best place fer growin’ boys,” and Jacob lifted Miffins into the wagon as tenderly as when he took him from the station four months before.



## CHAPTER X.

*John Anstey*

IT was a dreary night in November. Few people were on the streets, that looked dim and snow-blown in the swirling sleet that drove up from the bay.

John Anstey sat in his den in the third story of the great house on Fifth Avenue. There was a glowing fire of sea-coal in the ample grate. Heavy curtains of a warm, rich red were drawn before the windows. Now and then, a fierce blast from the sea swept the city and roared into its chimney-throats.

It was a large room, the walls lined with low book-shelves, filled to overflowing, with gun- and pipe-racks.

A mahogany writing-table was piled with pamphlets and loose sheets of manuscript; in the centre was a basket of growing ferns, for Anstey liked always a bit of green-growing things about him when he worked. An exquisite girl's face, painted on an oval of ivory and cased in violet velvet, stood just at one side of the fern-



basket. The chairs and chintz-covered couch were simple enough, but the skins of the Alaska bear and fox that lay about on the polished floor, and the few etchings and water-colors on the walls, gave an air of elegance and richness to the room.

John Anstey sat on a low chair before the grate. There was no light but the firelight. His elbows were on his knees and his head sunk and face buried in his hands. It was an attitude of deep thought and dejection.

He was twenty-eight, stood five feet eleven in his stockings, was a blue-ribbon Yale man of '8--, and wore his Phi Beta Kappa key with pardonable pride. He was one of the best half-backs Yale had ever produced, deep of chest, broad of shoulder, clean-limbed and clean-lived — one of the best specimens of American manhood and muscular Christianity.

After leaving college, he had prepared himself for his lifework, which was to aid, to the extent of his heart, his head and his money, his fellow men.

He was known among his mates as "the Reformer," among the up-town newsboys as "my Fifth Aveny pal," among the lower East-side residents as "the man who runs the lodging-house," and among men who watched the signs of the times as the best organizer among the younger generation.



He had just completed his plans for his winter's work, which was his joy, for his heart and soul were in it, and now he must give it all up, and fight for his life. He groaned as he sat there with his head in his hands, bowed, as if weighted with sorrow.

It was so hard to give it up! So hard to begin the struggle, and the physician had said "No delay."

He knew a year ago that all had not been quite right, but thought little of it, he was so strong. But of late he had been warned, and the physician's examination had settled the matter. He must go away to a high, dry climate, to strengthen the citadel of his life, his lungs. The doctor had suggested a year of out-of-door living in the Tyrol. But John Anstey shook his head.

"No foreign lands for me, now," he said. "If I've got to die, I'll die where I love to live, in America."

"Pooh! Don't talk about dying," said the doctor.

But he knew it was bluff, and took it for what it was worth. He had made up his mind, however, to live if he could.

"The Adirondacks," the doctor suggested again. But again John Anstey shook his head. "Colorado?"



"No, I must go where I can work, or there'll be no use — I'll think it over."

"And let me know you have your bag packed by the end of the week," said the doctor, with a clasp of the hand that spoke for him.

Where should he go? That was what Anstey was thinking as he groaned into his hands.

He had not as yet told his mother and father.

He rose at last with the problem unsolved, and lighted the student-lamp on the table. The young sister's exquisite face looked up at him from under it. He was no coward, but the remembrance of the quick passing of that young life, and the sharpness of his own grief and of those he loved, overpowered him.

We will leave him with himself for a few minutes.

There was a knock at the door. John answered it by opening it. Joseph gave him a letter.

"A letter, Mr. John, as Mrs. Anstey has just read — and would you read it before dinner?"

"Yes." He sat down by the table, unfolding the sheet without interest. The letter ran:

"HURDYVILLE, VERMONT,

"Nov. 15th, 189--.

"MY DEAR MRS. ANSTEY: — You told me to write you when I felt like it. I have felt like it many times, and should have answered your



kind letter before, but I didn't want to write wholly about myself, so I waited until I could send some news.

"I have plenty now! You remember I told you about Miffins, the crippled newsboy at Mr. Foss's? I don't think he meant to get me into any trouble, not really — and he really didn't, you know, because through him (in a very roundabout way, to be sure) I came to know you and Mr. Anstey. But he has got some really nice boys into trouble, and I only wish Mr. Anstey were here to straighten them out, as he did me!

"He read dime novels to them, 'Jack the Pirate,' — he lent it to me once, but I was disgusted after reading two chapters, — 'The Freebooters,' and detective stories, and told them all about New York until they got quite wild to do something irregular. I'm not blaming them, you know, because I was just as bad myself once, — not so very long ago! — as you and Mr. Anstey know, but I'm just telling you the news.

"The boys knew of a cave near the Branch, and they made Miffins their leader, and *stole* things! calling themselves 'Freebooters.' They stole from lots of people. The Congregationalist minister's son was one, and Lawyer Slocum's two boys, and a poor fellow called Seth, who is Deacon Simms's — he is the Methodist deacon —



hired boy — that is, he works for his board and clothes and goes to school in the winter and spring terms — were the others.

“ They stayed all night finally in the cave, and Billy Slocum is ill with pneumonia, because it was such a cold night. Seth has been arrested for stealing the deacon’s buffalo-robe, but he says he didn’t. The queer part of it is, the boys won’t tell on each other, and nobody knows but me why Billy is ill and *who* is to blame.

“ I wish I could see you or Mr. Anstey for five minutes to talk with and tell me if I ought to *tell*. You see Miffins never told on *me* — and it seems so mean for me to turn ‘ State’s evidence,’ as papa used to say.

“ Can’t you tell me what to do?

“ You remember you said I really ought to go to school this winter. Mrs. Liscom won’t afford it — and I *won’t* go to the district school. They have had such a queer specimen for a teacher. The boys played all sorts of tricks on him, and the girls made a muff and gave it to him, he was such a ‘ sissy.’

“ He’s gone now; he told the committee he couldn’t stand it — and I think it must have been rather trying. But I don’t know as I blame them much — when you don’t respect any one, it is not so bad to make fun of them, is it?

“ The schoolhouse is closed now while the



committee try to find another teacher; it will be hard work, I imagine, for the salary is only eight dollars a week, and the teacher 'boards 'round.' If only I were a man, I'd offer myself.

"How I would love to give you a kiss and tell you how different things are since you talked with me that morning I left! And Mr. John — I can never tell him what I feel about it all. Give my love to him, and tell him Mr. and Mrs. Foss are as dear and lovable as ever — and I envy naughty Miffins living with them.

"I have been angelic lately; sewed together four rag rugs (I hate them!), washed dishes every meal without a murmur, and knit Dan a pair of mittens. Tell Mr. Anstey I've read that lovely book he sent me, and have learned all those French verbs except two.

"Do please write me soon and tell me if you think I ought to *tell!* I say soon; that means in two or three days, because Billy's pneumonia has taken, the doctor says, 'a turn for the worse,' and Seth is locked up in Deacon Simms's cider-mill!

Lovingly,

"NANCY LISCOM."

With John Anstey, to think was generally to act. He had been thinking so long without action as he sat before the firelight for the last two hours, that it was a relief to summon Joseph,



to write a telegram, to pen two letters, and placing a special delivery stamp on each, ask for an answer thereto by telegram.

He went down to dinner apparently in the best of spirits, and no one dreamed, as he chatted and laughed with the two guests and his father and mother, that only an hour before his soul had been in the shadow of the valley. He had found — or as he preferred to put it to himself — been shown, a solution of his problem.



## CHAPTER XI.

### *The New Boarder*

A VIGILANCE Committee had been formed in Hurdyville, and Jacob Foss was one of the three; Deacon Simms and Lawyer Slocum were the other two.

They had called a meeting in the village grocery, which was also the post-office, and the place at which all telegrams arriving at Barnet were delivered.

Deacon Simms had caused the constable, a burly lumberman of Barnet, to arrest Seth on circumstantial evidence of having stolen his buffalo-robe. In vain Seth protested his innocence.

"Yer'll prove it," said the deacon, grimly, and forthwith locked him into the cider-mill, which was kept fairly warm, as the deacon was doing his fall slaughtering and sausage-making in it.

Complaints had been coming in from one farmer and another, that this thing or that thing was missing — nothing of great value in itself, but it made them uneasy. Lawyer Slocum had



appointed the committee to hear complaints and endeavor to detect the culprit.

Late on this special November afternoon, several had driven up to the grocery store, and, while waiting for the mail by the Barnet stage, entered their complaints.

Jacob was writing on a barrel head.

"You take evidence, Squire Slocum, 'n' I'll set down the items.

"*Mem.* Forty foot half-inch manila rope. I must say I'd hate ter lose *thet*.

"*Mem.* One willer clothes-basket — when did yer wife miss *thet*, Joe?"

"'Bout four weeks ago, 'n' she's hunted high 'n' low fer it ever sence."

"*Mem.* Two old halters, one good hold-back. Them's yourn, Barzy?"

"Yes," piped an old man with a dried-apple face. "But I ain't complainin', Jacob; I don't want ter set nobody agin me — only it makes me so pesky mad ter hev things taken right from under my nose."

"Yer right, Barzy; I hain't missed nothin' yit, but mebbe I shall. Reuben Liscom's missed two sheep pelts he's been savin' fer foot-warmers this winter.

"*Mem.* Two pelts."

"I might er split up my old meal-chest last winter," drawled Farmer Babcock, "but anyway it's gone."



“*Mem.* One meal-chest.

“*Mem.* One good buffalo-robe.”

“I missed my small hatchet lately,” said Lawyer Slocum, “but I may have mislaid it.”

“*Mem.* One small hatchet,” repeated Jacob. “‘Thet’s all? Wal — thet’s a purty good showin’ of deviltry fer one small town. Guess ’twas time we kept our eyes peeled. There’s the stage.”

The stage-driver put a telegram into Lawyer Slocum’s hand. “That come this mornin’, but there warn’t nobody ter deliver it.”

Mr. Slocum looked at the address. “To the Members of the School Committee, Hurdyville, Vermont.” He opened it quickly.

“Would like to secure the place at present vacant as teacher in the district school. Am a Yale graduate, twenty-eight years old. References follow in letter. Wire answer.

“JOHN ANSTEY,  
“*University Club, New York City.*”

“Well, this has the right ring,” said Mr. Slocum. “Guess I’ll telegraph, ‘If references satisfactory, place is yours.’ This takes a load off of my mind.”

Jacob was turning a letter post-marked New York over and over in his hand.

“This beats all creation! Who could be er writin’ ter me from New York? Guess I’ll take



it home to Marthy 'n' we'll read it tergether." He placed it carefully in his breast pocket.

Lawyer Slocum had already spread the news, and in a few hours it was carried by stage and farm wagon over the hills and through the valleys.

Jacob's excitement increased as he neared the Roost. What could the letter mean?

"Marthy, Marthy," he called out as he drove into the yard. Martha appeared at the kitchen door with her apron thrown over her head, for it was a bitter night.

"Here's a letter from New York — open it quick, marm, and tell us what's in it. I'll be back by the time you've got the sense o' it."

He was back in a few minutes. "Wal, sonny, yer ain't left no chores fer me; everything ez snug and slick ez ef I'd done it myself, 'n' I don't say *thet* often ter any man. — Now, marm, read *thet* letter."

Martha had opened the envelope with the bread-knife, and looked at the signature, which did not enlighten her in the least. So she turned to the beginning:

"UNIVERSITY CLUB, NEW YORK CITY,

"November 16th, 189--.

"MR. JACOB FOSS.

"DEAR SIR: — I have applied for the position of teacher in the district school of Hurdyville.



If my application receives an affirmative answer, I should like to ask a favor of you and Mrs. Foss. I have heard of the location of your farm and of your home, and, if possible, would like to secure board with you during the winter and spring.

"I should require two rooms — a bedroom and sitting-room, the sitting-room and bedroom to have open fireplaces, if possible. If convenient, I should like my breakfast in my own room — the other two meals I should prefer to take with the family. For wood — I shall require a great deal of it — and service, I shall pay extra. Kindly let me know by telegraph if you can accommodate me in case I receive a favorable answer from the gentlemen of the committee, and oblige,

"Yours truly,

"JOHN ANSTEX."

Martha dropped the letter in her lap.

"This beats all, father."

"I never heerd of city boarders in winter, marm. But I guess we'll hev ter say 'yes.' I like thet letter. What do you say? Fer you've got the hardest part."

"I'm willin'," said Martha. "The more in the old Roost the merrier, father, for there's no chickens to come home to it." Her blue eyes filled.



"What hev you got ter say 'bout it, sonny?" said Jacob, clapping Miffins on the shoulder.

"I'd like it well 'nuff, if he ain't a dude."

"Dude er no dude, I guess he knows er thing or two — he's college eddicated."

"Anyway, I'll help Mother Foss all I can," said Miffins, looking off into the corner of the room, for it was the first time he had called her that — and the Vigilance Committee had set him thinking.

"Bless the boy," said Martha, "I couldn't have boarders without him, that's certain. Well, father, what'll you write? He can have the best room across the passage and the little bedroom out of it. I don't mind shiftin' the things, though they've stood there many a year. He wants you to telegraph — what er you goin' to say?"

Jacob sat down at the supper-table, and taking an old piece of brown paper from his wallet, with a pencil stub busied himself for a few minutes without answering.

Then he looked up. "Thar, read thet, Marthy."

And Martha read:

"To JOHN ANSTEY,

"University Club, New York City.

"We're agreed, and you can have the best room and the little spare bedroom, and as for



wood and service, you can have the run of the hundred acre wood-lot for nothing, and I'm at your service gratis. Board three dollars a week, and no washing.

“JACOB FOSS.”

“That telegram'll cost er sight, Jacob,” said prudent Martha. “Can't you cross out some of them ‘an's’?”

“That's easy,” said Jacob, and pared down the message.

“Agreed. Best room with spare bedroom yours, wood-lot yours gratis; service of me ditto. Board \$3 per week. No washing.”

“Now, how's thet?”

“It don't sound quite so good 'n' welcome as the other, Jacob. He might git a poor impression of us from that.”

So it was decided to send the telegram as it read at first, and Jacob drove down again after supper to despatch it.

John Anstey roared when he received it at eleven that night. The laugh did him no end of good, and he felt more courage than at any time since yesterday, when he had known the doctor's decision.

With the message in his hand, he knocked at



his mother's door, and, finding her still up, sat down on the rug and laid his head in her lap, as he had always done in the crises of life ever since he was a boy — and broke to her as gently as he could his decision and the necessity for it.

The Roost was a busy place during the next three days, for John Anstey had telegraphed he would be there on Saturday. Martha had hired in some "help," and the rag carpet was taken up in the best room and bedroom, and the deal floors scrubbed nearly white. The boarder had sent a letter after the telegram, in which he said he would like bare floors and little furniture. He would like Jacob to buy for him a large common kitchen table of hard pine, and a wood-box with a cover. He would bring with him his cot and mattress and a few things from home. He begged Mrs. Foss not to give herself too much trouble in attempting to arrange the rooms, as he would take pleasure in doing that work himself.

"I can't make them rooms look homelike, father," said Martha in despair, after the second day's preparations. "What does he want of bare floors? The rag carpet was so cheerful-lookin'. I had a lot of them rags dyed red to make it look warm."

"Wal, marm, he knows what he wants; them city fellers hez their own notions; we'll warm



him 'n' feed him, 'n' I guess he'll hev ter do the rest."

It was five days before Thanksgiving. Jacob drove down to Barnet to meet the six o'clock train, and as he waited for it, walking the platform and swinging and slapping his arms, for it was stinging cold, he recalled that hot July day when he had waited for the "waif" from the same city.

"Guess the Roost'll end by being er kind'uv asylum for city folks," said Jacob to himself. "I don't s'pose, now, that young feller hez thought anything 'bout bringin' anythin' extra fer these high latitudes uv ourn; I've got 'n extra robe 'n' my old overcoat ter help out with. Mebbe, too, he can't afford much extra — them teachers is generally pinched after they've got through college; and worked his way, I s'pose —" The train whistled, and Jacob looked eagerly at the coaches as they drew to a standstill, and was still looking when a voice said close beside him:

"Is this Mr. Foss?"

"To be sure — to be sure," said Jacob, somewhat taken by surprise. "Be you the new teacher?" He held out his hand, which was "gripped" (so Jacob said to Martha afterward) by the tall, young fellow smiling down into his face.

"Yes, I am John Anstey, and one of your



family for the present, am I not? Here, what are you doing?" For Jacob was taking his valise. "Please don't begin this way with me, for you don't know what you have undertaken. See there!" He pointed to the truck which the station-master was piling high with boxes and trunks and curious-shaped packages.

"Be them all yourn?"

"Yes, and if you'll excuse me for a few minutes, I'll help the expressman wrestle with my baggage—if you'll just take my coat. Thank you." He was off with a quick, firm step, leaving Jacob staring helplessly at the soft fur-lined coat that filled his arms.

"Jerusalem!" he muttered. "I wonder ef he is er dude! This feels like it. Guess I'll stow away my overcoat under the seat. But how in thunder be I ter git all that truck up the hill! Eth can't manage that to-night, 'n' ter-morrer's Sunday."

"It's good of you to come down this cold night to meet me, Mr. Foss; much pleasanter than driving up with a stranger. I've made arrangements with the station-master to have the things sent up to-night, but if you don't mind I'll take my brace of dogs up with me."

"Your dogs?" Jacob failed to grasp the fact that this was the future district-school teacher.

"Yes, my two hunters. I couldn't come up



into this region without them; besides, they're my friends," he added, "and glad enough to be let out of the baggage-car." He whistled, and two magnificent Gordon setters bounded toward him from behind the baggage-truck.

"They've been well brought up," he said, amused at Jacob's surprised silence, "and behave better than most children. I'll see that they don't trouble Mrs. Foss. I didn't bring my cob up, because I thought you might have one I could use for my own this winter."

For once in his life Jacob Foss had no ready answer. "His cob!" he thought; "what'll he spring on me next? Jerusalem! What'll Marthy say? This beats the waif all holler." But aloud he said:

"Wal, the more the merrier. I'll bring round Ethan, 'n' we'd better be gittin' 'long home; it's droppin' fast." By which Jacob meant that the mercury was looking downward toward zero.

That word "home" made Anstey silent, and neither he nor Jacob spoke much on the long, cold drive over the rough, frozen ground.

It was nearly eight o'clock when the wagon rattled into the yard, and the lights from the Roost shone out to welcome them. Martha appeared at the kitchen door with a shawl over her head.

"Is that you, father?" she called, cheerily, "'n' did you get him?"



"Yes, marm, here we are, but we're purty brittle; it's goin' ter be er stinger."

John Anstey has treasured that welcome in his heart and memory and will so long as memory lasts.

As he stepped into the warm, lighted kitchen, Martha Foss put out both hands and took his, and looking up into his handsome, manly face with true motherly affection and womanly admiration for such manhood (he was just the age her boy would have been), said simply, "I'm glad you got *home* before it snowed," and her blue eyes said the rest.

John wrote his mother afterward, it was all he could do to resist taking the little bunch of a woman in his arms and giving her a big kiss. But what he did say, was:

"I wish my mother could hear you say that, Mrs. Foss; she would feel happier to-night, and I should feel happier if she did."

Martha Foss knew then that grown-up men could feel as homesick sometimes as little boys.

"Come right into your rooms," she said, bustling about with a candle in one hand and a tin pitcher of hot water in the other. "I wish they looked more like home, but you know what you wrote," she said, apologetically.

"Yes, I know." He smiled, and determined to put on a good face, no matter what he might see.



They stepped across the cold passage, and Martha opened the best room door. It was ablaze with light. The great fireplace was heaped with hickory and pine, and the huge backlog glowed like a small smelting furnace.

An old-fashioned crane swung above the fire, and on it hung a little, old, black kettle that was sending forth a cloud of steam and singing merrily. The pine table stood in the middle of the bare floor, and on it was a large, round wooden chopping-tray, filled with beautiful, growing sword-ferns.

In the small bedroom, which John examined with all the eager delight of a boy, there was a fireplace, likewise crackling a warm welcome. On one side, heaped high with a mountainous featherbed, stood a huge four-post bedstead with a warm blue and white woollen coverlet. A small wash-stand and an old splint-bottom rocking-chair with a patchwork cushion completed the furnishings of this room.

John Anstey returned to the best room with a sense of possession.

"There is no apology needed for this room, Mrs. Foss," he said, enthusiastically. "It is what I dreamed of when a boy, but never have seen. Look at these closets! Just the thing for my pipes!" He opened two wall-closets high up on each side of the fireplace, and on a level



with the narrow mantel. "Where does this lead to?" he inquired, opening a narrow deal door in the wall at the back of the passage. "And what is this hole for? A cat-hole?"

He laughed with delight.

Martha explained that when the house, which was very old, had been altered, this door, which led to the garret, was left in the best room.

"So you have a real garret? I've read about them, as a boy, in New England story-books — but I've never seen one that looked as they sounded. Perhaps it was because I was a boy. Where did you get these ferns?" He thought at once how the young sister's picture in the violet frame should stand there beneath their delicate fronds.

"I forgot to tell you," said Martha, with a bright smile. "Nancy Liscom filled this bowl for you, and said she would leave it for a greeting for the new teacher."

Anstey was more touched than he cared to confess. He could not speak, for he did not know how much Martha Foss knew or did not know. He was silent, while Martha went on volubly:

"She's the best scholar 'round here — Squire Liscom's daughter. Poor child, she hain't no father nor mother, 'n' my heart goes out ter her, for she's a lonely little soul, 'n' doesn't know what



she needs, 'n' that's father 'n' mother love. Why, there's Jacob callin', 'n' me stannin' here talkin' when you oughter be hevin' your supper. It's most bedtime now." Martha hurried away.

John heard a low whine at the door, and opening it, in bounded the two setters, leaping upon him and licking his hands, wild with the joy of having found him.

"Well, old fellow," he said, as Siegfried rose on his hind legs, and laid his fore paws lovingly on his master's shoulder, "we might be in a worse place. Here, give Freya a chance."

The beautiful creature clasped his arm with her fore paws and looked up devotedly into her master's face. He left them both stretched before the fire when he heard Mrs. Foss call him across the passage:

"Come ter your supper."

John Anstey sat down at the round table in the long, low kitchen that was Martha's pride, and enjoyed a supper of cold roast chicken and mealy baked potatoes, sweet pickles, delicious coffee, baked sweet apples with Jersey cream, clotted and rich, and fresh gingerbread — and all the time felt as if he were eating in a story-book.

The end of the kitchen toward the passage was the general sitting-room. A long, comfortable settle with blue and white patchwork cushions stretched along the wall for some eight feet.



Jacob's father's armchair, Martha's low, splint-bottomed, grass-green rocker, and two straw chairs, brightened with cushions of turkey-red cotton, filled that end.

The middle of the room was occupied by the round table, four quaint kitchen chairs, and the china cupboard, under which Martha kept her loaf sugar, jellies, and tea. The stove, the dresser well set out with everything needful, including parts of old blue and brown sets that had belonged to Martha's grandmother, dry sink, water-butt, and kneading-table furnished the part next the woodshed.

A large pantry, in reality a small room, opened from the back wall by the kitchen stove, on the other side of which was Miffins's room, a twin to the pantry.

A door opened directly from the back porch into the sitting-room end, and one at the kitchen end into the wood-shed. Five sunny windows, east and south, were provided with shelves and brackets for Martha's plants, which seemed to fill all the room with greenery: begonias, wax-plants, hardy geraniums, oxalis, fuchsias. A small door at the passage end led up to the "south chamber," where Jacob and Martha slept warm and undaunted by all below-zero weather, fortified by their feather bed and the kitchen stove-pipe that ran through the room from floor to ceiling.



It was a feast for John Anstey's city-bred eyes. Here there was no playing at simplicity as in an Adirondack camp, but it was the real, New England home article, genuine and guaranteed.

As he sat down with Jacob and Martha, Jacob said:

"Where's thet boy?"

"He went out ter look fer Fidget, father; he'll be in in er minute."

"Wal, I ain't er goin' ter say grace till he comes — not ter-night," said Jacob, emphatically, with a kindly look at his guest.

In a moment John heard the stump, stump of a crutch, and Miffins entered with the puppy under one arm; his rough woollen cap was drawn over his forehead and ears, and but little of his face showed. But John caught the keen "sizing-up" look that Miffins, apparently indifferent, fixed on him, and laughing inwardly, he thought, "I've met a good many of your kind before."

"Come, sonny, set up; vittles is coolin' fast. This is yer new teacher, Mr. John Anstey, 'n' our new boarder. This yere is our boy, Miffins."

John rose and extended his hand as man to man. Miffins looked up at the tall, athletic figure, and into the kindly, determined brown eyes. Then he looked at the hand that was held out to him, shapely and white and strong like



the surgeon's at Bellevue. He put his own small, chapped one into it, and it was lost in a grasp that for no known reason caused one of those troublesome lumps to rise in the boy's throat.

Then and there, in that hand-clasp, John Anstey won the entire allegiance of a boy's heart. Not a bad heart, either, at bottom, for all appearances were against it, but a heart that was not yet aroused to beat for what was true and manly and generous; and no wonder, with the up-bringing of New York streets and the loveless life of a "waif," knowing neither father nor mother, nor any earthly tie. God help us, there be many such!

Jacob's grace was always the same:

"We thank thee, Lord, fer this meal of vittles, 'n' may the next one find us jest ez thankful. Amen."

"I wish ter-morrer warn't Sunday jest fer once," said Martha, as she cleared the table, while Miffins put a large checked gingham apron of Martha's around his neck and prepared to wash the dishes, with a strange feeling of contentment that he was in the same room with the new teacher.

"Why, Mrs. Foss?" asked John.

"Coz all that truck of yours is coming right up the hill this very minute, so Jacob says, 'n' I'd like ter git things settled for you by ter-



morrer. 'Twould seem more homelike for Sunday; it's a dretful lonesome day away from your home."

"I'll settle to-night, Mrs. Foss, if you'll lend me a hammer, screw-driver, and a few nails, and a broom. Miffins can help me, can't you, even if it does keep you up a bit late?"

Miffins looked up from the dish-pan with a pleased smile for answer. He would see all the things then, and handle them, too!

No sooner were the dishes finished than a great commotion in the yard announced the arrival of "the truck." Jacob went out with the lantern, and Martha threw her blanket shawl over her head, that she might have the first peep.

She laughed to herself as box after box, chest after chest, was carried into the best room through the front door and passage. Two trunks and some large, curious-looking packages followed. "'N' I thought he was poor!" she thought, and laughed again.

The dogs were put out of the way in the bedroom, where Martha had set a fine supper for them unbeknown to John, and their master and Miffins went to work.

"Don't sit up, Mrs. Foss, for us, please. I'll do all the hammering first, so you won't be kept awake. I'm afraid it will be rather late before we get through."



Miffins took note of that "we."

Martha laughed again. "I couldn't go ter sleep if I went to bed. I'm longin' ter know how that bare room'll look with all those things in it, 'n' I'm goin' ter set up till I see!"

It was John's turn to laugh. "I'll tell you what, Mrs. Foss, we'll send Mr. Foss off to his room, and you can sit up till I call you in to inspect."

"No, yer don't," said Jacob, who had just come in and closed the front door. "Ef Marthy sets up, I'm er goin' ter, 'n' I'll clear up ez fast ez yer can make litter, 'n' then by Sunday, we'll be ready to settle down. Come, Marthy, our room's better'n our comp'ny just now," and he drew her reluctantly into the kitchen and shut the door.

"Now, Miffins, we'll get down to work. I'll open these boxes; you unpack, and I'll dump all the lumber and burlap into the passage. That'll clear out the room best." They set to work with a will.

In less than an hour, John stepped into the kitchen.

"Now, Mr. Foss, if I may trouble you to lend a hand, we'll get this largest packing-box into the shed. Then if you will do me the honor to step into *my* best room, I shall be pleased to play host as well as you."



As Martha crossed the passage with Jacob behind her, she paused on the threshold of the "best room," speechless with admiration.

"Oh, father!" was all she could say at first, and laid her hand eloquently upon his arm.

"Allow me, Mrs. Foss," said John, and offering his arm, which Martha took as if it were the most natural thing in the world to be escorted by a young and handsome man, he led her to a large, low bamboo chair, cushioned with olive green corduroy, and placed her in it.

"Oh, father!" said Martha again, with a sigh of perfect contentment.

"Wal, marm, yer seem ter hev found yer right place at last! This does beat all!" he exclaimed, stepping gingerly about with his great cowhide boots, and avoiding the rugs.

Martha could only sigh. It was beyond anything she had ever imagined, and it was the Roost that held all this supreme satisfaction.

At the four windows of the great square room hung the warm red curtains from John's Fifth Avenue den. On the floor lay the six-inch deep fur rugs of Alaskan bear, of blue and silver fox. The mysterious chests were portable bookcases, and there they stood between the windows and at each side of the fireplace with their brave showing of names that had been John Anstey's companions for years.



A cot, well-upholstered with seat and cushions, and covered with washable chintz, sage green, with sprays of old-fashioned single red pinks scattered here and there over it, filled the wall next the passage. John's leather smoker and two bamboo chairs with the green corduroy cushions completed the furnishings.

On the wall, over the book-shelves, hung the gun-racks; over the mantel a long pipe-rack. The other spaces were filled with a large etching of Mount Saint Michael, a photograph of that wonderful head of Raphael's only divine child, a water-color sketch of some Venetian fishing-boats, a framed photograph of Phillips Brooks, a cast of Lincoln's head, life-size, a large photograph of the Yale campus and chapel, a snap-shot of the last rush of that famous Yale foot-ball team of which John had been half-back.

The ample pine table, fully five feet by four, was piled with pamphlets and writing-materials.

On one end stood the student-lamp, on the other the wooden bowl of ferns, and beneath the delicate fronds his young sister's exquisite face looked out from its velvet frame.

Is it to be wondered at that Martha Foss folded her busy hands, labor-hardened, so contentedly in her lap, and sighed again, "Oh, father!"

Long after his guests were in bed, John Anstey sat in the firelight with his head in his hands, not



in despair, as he had sat a few nights before in his den in the great city, with the life of which he felt so closely identified, but in utter thankfulness that the stern battle for life which he was about to wage, could still be fought in the ranks — shoulder to shoulder with his fellow men.

The old eight-day clock in the passage struck twelve. John drew out his watch mechanically and compared the time. Only a minute's difference. A slight thing — but it suggested pleasant thoughts, and with that he went, or rather, as he wrote his mother afterward, “dove into the feather bed.”



## CHAPTER XII.

### *The Vigilance Committee*

THE school did not begin until the Monday after Thanksgiving, and Anstey had ample time and opportunity to hear from Martha the narrative of Nancy's escapade, and from Jacob a detailed relation of the progress of the Vigilance Committee, and the reasons for its existence.

"But the queer part of it is," said Martha one day at dinner, "that there ain't a soul in this village 'n' Barnet that knows where she went or who she saw or what she did, 'n' nobody dassen't say a word to her about it. She holds her head higher'n ever, sence she come back. Queer she ain't been here 'fore now. She was mighty anxious ter get them ferns over in time."

"I thought perhaps she would be one of the scholars, and I could thank her for them next Monday," said John.

"Well, mebbe she will, if she gets acquainted with you. I guess you could manage her. Just



let her see them books 'n' she won't feel like makin' fun, as she used to, of every new teacher."

"Are you going to school this term, Miffins?"

For answer, Miffins looked at Jacob Foss.

"Yer look ez ef yer wanted to jine the rest, sonny?"

"I'd like to, but I don't see how I can," said Miffins, hesitatingly.

"What's ter hinder?"

Miffins looked down in his plate and fingered his crutch.

John answered for him.

"Perhaps he is wondering how he can get there, Mr. Foss; I think I can make some arrangement if it should not be convenient for you to take him; I shall walk generally."

"Ef the boy wants ter go, he's goin'. Larnin' don't hurt nobody if it's larned right. I can fix things so he can go regular. But yer must do us proud, sonny."

Miffins had nothing to say. The Vigilance Committee was more in his thoughts than he would have been willing to confess, and, since that night when Nance disappeared, Jacob's shotgun had been a constant reminder of what might be if ever he was found out. Moreover, as he fell asleep the last few nights, he had curious feelings about Seth in the cider-mill.

So it was decided that Miffins was to attend



school during the winter term, if his strength was sufficient. This was on Tuesday, but between Tuesday and Monday the unexpected may happen.

As Jacob rose from the table, there was an unwonted commotion in the yard. He went to the window and looked out. Then he laughed aloud.

"Jest come here, Mr. Anstey, 'n' see the fun." John went to the window. A light snow was falling, and the ground was covered. Round and round in the middle of the yard flew Siegfried and Freya and Fidget. Over and over they rolled, heads and tails in seemingly inextricable confusion. Then Siegfried and Freya set their teeth in a patch of something that showed a dull yellowish white against the snow, and pulled and pulled in true "tug-of-war" style, Fidget meanwhile tearing madly around the contestants, yelping, whining, snapping, in vain endeavor to get a hold, too.

"What's thet they've got?" said Jacob, "'tain't one er Marthy's dish-rags, is it? — nor a meal-bag," he added, stepping to the door.

"Jerusalem!" he shouted, "it's Reuben Liscom's pelt. Come on, Mr. Anstey! Come on, sonny!" he cried, forgetting Miffins's infirmity, "we've got track of them rascals now!" And seizing his hat and overcoat he rushed from the house, followed by John, who looked just



once at Miffins as he passed him. Miffins caught the look and knew that somehow Anstey *knew* — and the knowledge made him miserable.

John called off the dogs, and sure enough what the dogs had left, after worrying the pelt into small pieces, was a tattered haunch-piece and a tail; on the under side in red letters was “R. L.”

“Guess we’ll organize ernotheer Vigilance Committee, Mr. Anstey, ’n’ ferret out this thievin’ business.”

“I’ll help you all I can, Mr. Foss; shall I set the dogs on the scent?”

“Wal, thet would be ’n idee; Fidget here hain’t no responsibility, ’n’ wouldn’t know his own tracks from a woodchuck’s. But them critters o’ yourn air born trackers. We’ll foller on.”

John called the dogs and gave them the scent, and in a few minutes they were loping along, noses almost in the snow, and following faint little tracks that were made by Fidget, the indomitable, who, at the risk of losing his wind, had tugged the whole pelt up from the cave, a distance of two and a half miles! But he had not used the highroad. Consequently Jacob and John took a fine cross-country run on their own account and found themselves after a tough hour’s tramping on the top of the bank.

“Wal — I vum!” said Jacob, as he leaned nearly breathless against the trunk of the beech. “This beats me.”



"Don't say that yet, Mr. Foss, we've some sharp work before us yet. Look at the dogs!"

Siegfried was going back on his tracks, Freya was whining a little anxiously as if she had lost a yard or two. They sought this way and that. Suddenly Fidget gambolled into view over the brow of the hill, and, after stopping short for a moment to make sure it was his "halloo," dashed down the slope with such reckless impetus that he went right over the bank, and rolled over and over until he landed on the ledge twenty feet below.

John laughed aloud. "It's Fidget that'll be in at the finish, Mr. Foss. See! He's given my dogs points already."

And sure enough, Siegfried and Freya were already slipping, sliding, nosing their way down the precipitous bank.

"Where they can go, I can follow, Mr. Foss, but perhaps you had better stay here."

"Not much," said Jacob, stoutly. "I'm er goin' ter see this thing through. Look er here!" He fairly shouted in his excitement. Coiled on the other side of the huge trunk lay the forty feet of Manila rope, one end attached to the pulley on the projecting bank.

"This grows interesting," said John. "Here, take hold of the rope, Mr. Foss, and that will give you a purchase on this steep decline."



"Thet's ernother idee," said Jacob, and following John, he worked his way down, holding tightly by the rope. When he felt the firm ledge beneath his feet, he straightened himself and looked about him.

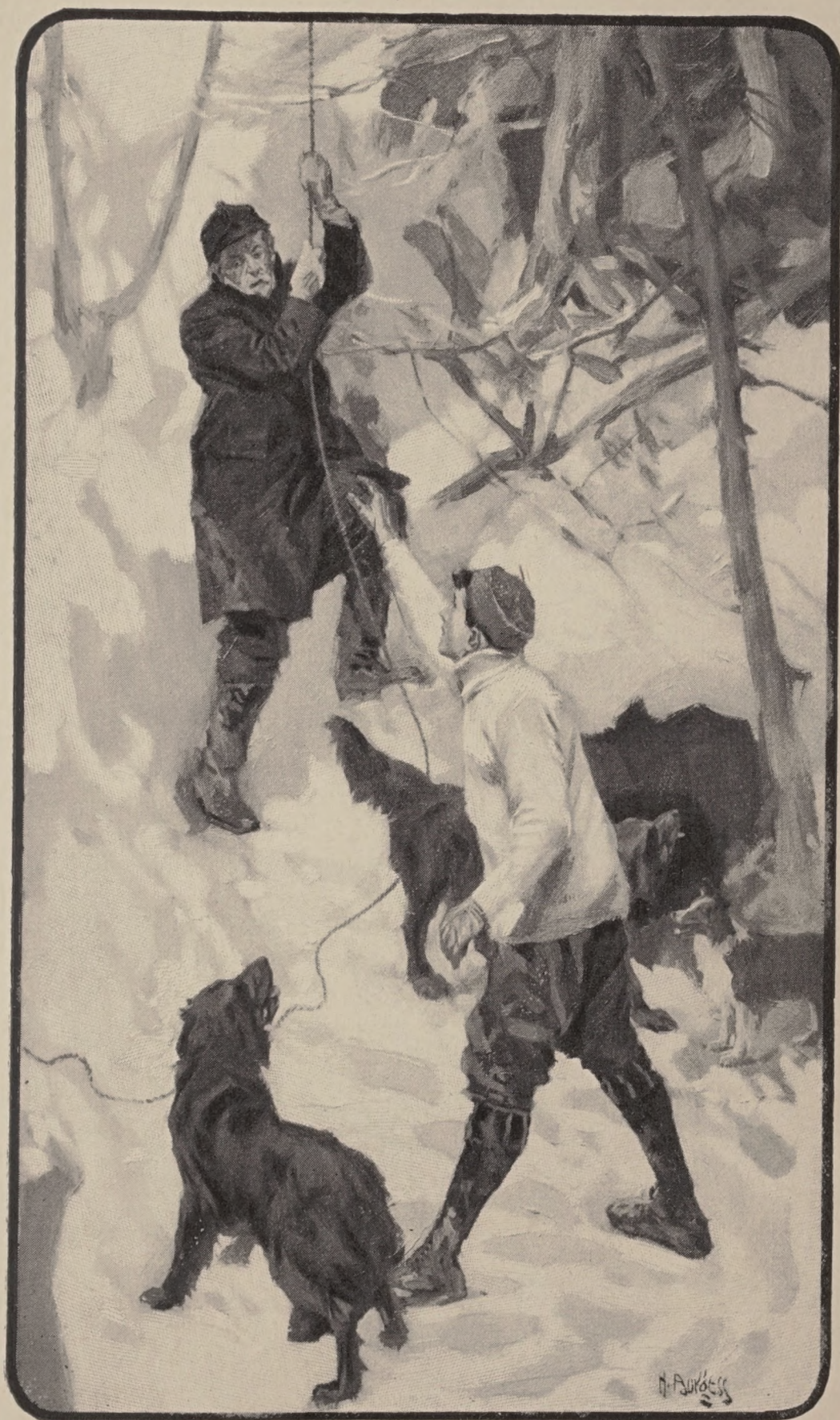
"Wal, I've lived in this township ever sence I wuz born, 'n' I never knew we had a wilderness like this right at our door."

Well might he say "wilderness." John Anstey stood out upon the extreme edge of the ledge, silent in the presence of such grandeur. Three hundred feet below him, as a plummet drops, beneath a stretch of black pines, the Branch roared over Beaver Dam. Across the narrow valley, just dimmed with the light falling snow, the giants of the Green Mountain range towered, vast, uncertain of outline, overpowering in their half-shrouded blackness. East and west beneath him as far as he could see, hilltops, densely wooded, overlapped one another. Turning, he saw behind him a mass of rock covered with beech, hemlock, and spruce. Level with the ledge on which he stood was an opening some six feet wide by four high.

A smothered exclamation issued from the cave, — then Jacob backed out on his hands and knees, pulling the buffalo-robe after him.

"This beats all!" he cried, as he cleared his head and shoulders of corn-husks and the knees





*"HE WORKED HIS WAY DOWN, HOLDING  
TIGHTLY BY THE ROPE."*







of his trousers of gravel. "I don't believe that Seth did steal that robe no more'n I did. They're old han's at it that contrived this infernal hole. See here!"

He pulled out the clothes-basket, which was rigged with the halters and the hold-back in such a way as to steady the load, as it was hoisted to the top of the bank, however heavy it might be.

"Can you identify these things?" asked John. "If you can, we can hoist them up to the bank now and drive down for them with the wagon. I suppose the sooner the men get what has been taken, the better the chances to find out the thief; although there has been more than one here," he said, as he crawled into the cave.

"How can yer tell?"

"Here's an apple with the marks of one set of teeth, and here's a piece of cheese near the rind with the impress of another set," laughed John, "and here is the half of a cigarette with one end chewed, which shows the smoker was new to his business, and here's another scrap of one smoked to the last whiff by an old hand."

"Wal, yer know suthin' 'sides book-larnin'!" said Jacob, admiringly. "What more can yer find out?"

"Here's the skin of a fox that has been shot with a rifle, and the same calibre ball as an old one I had as a boy, and here" — he threw out



the skins behind him as he spoke, "is another that has been peppered with buckshot. It's a burning shame to use such heavy shot on a little fellow such as this must have been. I'd like to catch a man doing it!" he exclaimed.

One after another, he drew, or threw out, the furnishings of the cave, meal-chest, hatchet, skins, beer-bottles, cigar-stumps, and sheep-pelt. Jacob was dumb with amazement. He had stumbled over the clay hearth, and brushing away the snow saw the charred bits of wood still on it. Then he found his tongue.

"Guess 'twas er goin' ter be 'n all winter's job with 'em," he remarked, as he loaded the clothes-basket preparatory to hoisting his spoils to the bank, "but it 'pears they got sick of it — 'n' I should er thought they might er," he chuckled. "Take er stinging night now, sech ez we had las' night, in thet inside hole — ugh! it makes me shiver jest ter think on't."

John climbed the bank and swung in the basket from the improvised crane, then let down the rope, for Jacob to pull himself up by.

"Can't I help you, Mr. Foss?" he called down to him.

"No, gimme time, 'n' I'll fetch it," said Jacob, puffing heavily, "but, durn me, ef I want ter be a Vigilance Committee again."

They turned homeward in the quickly failing



light, the three dogs, off duty, bounding with joy and yelping excitedly.

"Marthy, Marthy!" Jacob shouted, as he neared the house. Martha appeared at the door, but no Miffins.

"Why, father, what ails you? er hollerin' ez if —" But Jacob interrupted her:

"We've got 'em, marm!"

"Got who?" said Martha, bewildered.

"Them rascals ez hez been settin' all us old fellers by the ears. Here's Reuben's other pelt!"

"Do tell!" said Martha.

Miffins, listening from the wood-shed, heard Jacob's exultant words, and with a queer, sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, hitched away to the barn to milk before dark.

At supper, and afterward, Jacob was full of his discovery, and determined to drive down that very evening to the village to tell Lawyer Slocum and take back Deacon Simms's buffalo-robe.

"Coz it goes agin me," he said, "ter hev thet poor feller shut up in thet cider-mill these cold nights. I reckon the deacon's purty hard on him. Besides, I want ter hear how Billy is."

"Well, I would go," said Martha, sympathetically. And Jacob went.

"Come into my room after your work is done, Miffins. I want to ask about the boys that you know are coming to school this term. Perhaps



I can tell you about some of the boys you knew in the city."

"Yes, sir," said Miffins; he had learned that from John during the three days he had been in the house with him; for that gentleman never addressed Jacob but as "Mr. Foss" or "sir."

"Here, make yourself comfortable, Miffins." He drew one of the low bamboo chairs up before the fire, and reached for his pipe in the rack above.

"The doctor allows me one a day, that is all." He smiled. "I call that hard lines, don't you, Miffins?"

Miffins wanted to talk, but he didn't know how to begin with this man whom he adored with all his boy's heart; but he ventured with a look of admiration at the tall, straight form:

"Yer don't look ez if yer needed er doctor."

"I don't, do I?" laughed John. "But that's just where appearances are most deceitful. Now, I'm here, Miffins, and I don't mind telling you, for I know you won't peach to any one in the village — I've come up here to fight."

"To fight?" echoed Miffins.

"Yes, to fight the kind of a battle that a good many men have to fight some time or other, but not often at my age. Did you ever see a prize-fight?"

"Yes — a bully one," said Miffins. "But I don't know what yer mean."



"I know you don't; but if I tell you I'm at present an underweight champion with the odds against me, and liable to be knocked out at the fifth round for good and all, you'll understand, won't you?"

"Yer don't mean," said Miffins, his voice rising shrill and high in his excitement — "yer don't mean yer goin' ter *die*!"

"Not if I can help it," replied John Anstey, quietly — "and that's my fight and why I'm here. Won't you have a cigarette?"

Miffins took it mechanically, and John watched him closely.

"Mind you, I don't offer that to boys as a rule — but you've smoked many a one on the curbstone before now — and I want company just for to-night."

He knelt by the fire, and taking a coal from it with the tongs, lighted his pipe, and sat down in the other low chair opposite Miffins.

"How long were you in Bellevue, Miffins?"

"Five months — but" — a sudden lump in Miffins's throat sent the smoke the wrong way and set him to coughing — "but I never thought er dyin'."

"No, of course, — they knew you wouldn't. You see that's the difference between us: you have every prospect of living to a good old age, although you came out pretty well handicapped



as to legs at first, while I haven't any prospect of a long life, and am as well supplied with legs and arms as a man need be to fight his way through. It's queer how things turn out that way. There's Spikes, now — ”

“ Spikes! ” interrupted Miffins, in great excitement. “ D'yer know Spikes? ”

“ Why, yes, do you? ”

“ Course — he wuz my pal for one winter. Where'd yer know Spikes? ”

“ In New York. He's round again now, but he's given up the papers. ”

“ Wot's he doin'? ”

“ Well, he's just now in an office down-town with a friend of mine. ”

“ In er office! ” Miffins could only echo John's words in his amazement.

“ Yes, you know he lost a leg? ”

“ I know, ” said Miffins, nodding.

“ I saw him in Bellevue. I'd known him before — and found he had a wonderful mind for figures, and when he came out, he went into my friend's office as accountant. ”

“ Wot does he get? ” was Miffins's practical question.

John smiled. He knew within a dollar what the newsboys made a month, so was prepared for Miffins's surprise.

“ Thirty dollars a month the first year. ”



"Thirty dollars!" Miffins could say no more.

"Have another cigarette? You've smoked yours clean." He drew out an envelope from his coat pocket, and took out very carefully the bit of a cigarette end he had found in the cave.

"Here's what I found to-day in the cave," he said, unconcernedly. "Seeing you smoke yours made me think of this." He compared the two, and then fixed his dark eyes kindly and inquiringly on Miffins.

The boy knew he was caught. Anstey turned away, knocked his pipe against the and-iron, laid it in the rack, and with his hands behind him, walked to the window, and looked out. Then he came back and stood in front of the boy, who shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Look here, Miffins" — but Miffins could not look just then; so John went on. "As I have told you, I have come up here to fight for my life, and when I came into the house that first night, I was glad and thankful to find you here; for I know a lot of boys in New York, and, I confess, it would have seemed pretty dreary without a single boy in sight — I'm so used to them. You see, I had heard of you before" — Miffins looked up quickly — "yes," John Anstey nodded, "from Nancy Liscom; I know all about that affair, and if I hadn't known what your life had been, — because I know so many boys' lives just



like yours, — I would have come up here and made you see some things in their right light. But knowing the life you boys lead, I did not blame you any more than Nancy did. But since I have been in this home, and seen the love these kindly people have for you, and the way they trust you and treat you, it's gone against me to sleep a night in the house with a boy that carries two faces like yours! Now if you have any manliness about you, — and you're different from every other boy I have ever known if you can't show up somehow as a man, — you'll make it straight with Mr. and Mrs. Foss and the other boys and their parents and the Vigilance Committee," — Anstey was unsparing now, for he was roused, — "and show people that you haven't come up here to accept favors that you couldn't get anywhere else, — crippled as you are," — Anstey knew what he was saying, — "and in return lead three boys into ways that will perhaps ruin them for life — perhaps take them out of life, for I hear Billy Slocum is very sick these last three days."

Miffins looked up half-defiantly. "I can't peach," he said.

"That's all nonsense," said John Anstey. "It's the other boys that are so honorable they won't peach on *you*. *You* got them into this scrape, and it is for you to help them out — and the



only way out is to tell on *yourself*. I don't see how you can sleep nights, knowing Seth is locked up in that cider-mill."

"What'll Mr. Foss say?"

"I don't know that he will say anything — but it wouldn't surprise me if he gave you a sound thrashing. If he does, take it like a man, knowing you deserve it."

Now Miffins had been braving it out as well as he could — but there was a limit to his power in this direction. He had a feeling he must get away from those dark eyes that never left his face; he rose suddenly — missed his crutch, and fell full length on the floor with his hurt leg nearly doubled under him. A groan of anguish — Anstey's arm was around him in a moment, and Miffins felt himself lifted in those strong arms, and then — well, between Tuesday noon and Tuesday night the unexpected can happen; our waif turned his face into the hollow of John Anstey's neck and sobbed as if his heart would break.

And John sat down on the cot with the boy still in his arms, and let him cry till his collar was wet through and the lapel of his shooting-jacket damp and wrinkled.

What they said to each other after that is no concern of any one's.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### *The Verdict of the Jury*

JACOB FOSS and John Anstey had a long talk on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

"I don't want ter be too hard on him," Jacob concluded, "but he's lied 'n' deceived 'n' ez good, or worse'n stole, fer he put them boys up ter it; he's helped git ez nice a gal, ef she wuz brought up right, ez ther is in the State 'bout ez nigh into a mean scrape ez he can, 'n' he's carried two faces, 'n' he's disgraced my good name with my neighbors, 'n' I ain't a-goin' ter let him off easy. No, sir!" said Jacob, bringing down his fist on the pine table, — for they were in John's room, — "Cripple or no cripple, slummy or Prince er Wales, it don't matter when it comes to makin' er man, 'n' he's got ter face the music 'n' make all square with my townsfolks *fust* — 'n' then he'll be on the right road ter work out his own salvation."

"You're right, Mr. Foss," replied Anstey. "Now, how shall he set about it?"



“Wal, ter-morrer’s Thanksgivin’, ’n’ I want ter eat my turkey in peace ’n’ with a good conscience, so I’ll hitch up this arternoon ’n’ we’ll take the boy ’long with us, ’n’ I’ll git the men ez wuz robbed ’n’ the boys ’n’ their fathers ter-gether in Lawyer Slocum’s office, ’n’ we’ll hev the verdict er the jury, ’n’ what *they* say the boy’s got ter stan’ by.”

“A good idea, Mr. Foss. You might see Miffins, now. You know,” and John smiled, “he does not feel any too comfortable about the buckshot.”

Jacob smiled, too. “Ter think it wuz thet half er boy I wuz er threatenin’, ’n’ never knew it!”

Unfortunately, Jacob spoke as he crossed the passage, and Miffins in the kitchen heard him — “half a boy!” The words rang in the boy’s ears — “half a boy.” He was stumping out of the room as Jacob entered. The man looked after him, and his face worked strangely. “My boy might er ben like *thet*,” he was thinking, but aloud he said, following Miffins and laying a hand on his shoulder to hold him back, “I wouldn’t er thought it of yer, sonny. Yer’ll go down with me ’n’ Mr. Anstey this arternoon ’n’ make it up ez well ez yer can?”

“Yes, sir,” said Miffins, not daring to look around. And not another word did Jacob say. Had he forgotten the “buckshot” threat, Miffins wondered?



"Half a boy." The words still rang in his ear as he went out to the barn. He felt ashamed to meet Jacob's eye, but he was lighter-hearted than he had been since Billy Slocum was taken ill and Seth locked up in the cider-mill.

"I'll make him take that back some day," said Miffins to himself, as he busied himself with the harness, "even if I am a cripple an' — an' a thief! The old duffer's give me a chance, an' I'll take it." And that was the last time that Miffins ever referred to Jacob Foss as "the old duffer."

In the small office were assembled Lawyer Slocum and Parson Leonard and Farmer Babcock and Joe and Deacon Simms and the constable and Barzy and Seth and Harry and Jim and Reuben Liscom and John Anstey. Jacob came in with Miffins; they had been waiting at the post-office till the jury had met. They took their seats on two stools.

Jacob's lips were drawn into a set, thin line. He had a most unpleasant duty to perform, and his throat grew dry and his voice husky as he spoke, for Lawyer Slocum had said, "The case is opened. Mr. Foss, have you anything to say?"

Jacob cleared his throat. Just then the office door flew open, and in walked Nance. She went straight to her uncle, and said:

"Uncle Reuben, I want to stay here with you,



it's my place." And down she sat at her uncle's side, and there was neither man nor boy but wanted her to stay. She was as pretty as a picture. She wore a light-blue flannel hood which tied close under her chin. Her eyes were dark with excitement and her cheeks snow-red with rapid walking, and her voice sounded so true, so decided, yet so sweet, that Miffins took courage. So John Anstey saw her — she never looked once at him — for the first time since his arrival.

Jacob cleared his throat again of the irritating cobweb that would spin itself in spite of him.

"I hain't got much ter say, neighbors; it's er new thing fer Jacob Foss ter hev ter apologize fer deviltry, 'n' fer any one ez is up ter it thet lives under his roof. I feel ez ef my good name hed been teched, when anything o' yourn hez been teched, 'n' I want ter say right here thet I acknowledge it wuz 'n experiment er takin' anybody from thet great Babel 'thout knowin' anythin' 'bout 'em; but I hedn't the least idee thet the experiment would tech yer lives er yer fortunes. I've brought the boy down here ter speak fer himself, 'n' we've agreed ter stan' by the verdict of the jury."

Jacob sat down and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, exactly as if he had been the culprit.



Miffins stood up and looked at Anstey, and Anstey looked at him. That look so kindly determined, yet loving and pitiful, put strength into his limbs and words upon his tongue.

"I would like to ask the defendant a few questions first," said Lawyer Slocum.

"All right, squire," said Jacob.

"What is your name?"

"Miffins."

"Your other name?"

"That's all."

"Where were you born?"

"I don't know."

"No father, no mother living?"

"Not that I knows of."

"You came from New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you live when there?"

Miffins was nonplussed and looked appealingly at Anstey. But the latter appeared to be deep in thought.

"Mostly nowheres."

"I don't understand."

"I lived round; slept with my pal in the lodgin's when we had the cash, an' when we didn't, lay round in the packin'-boxes in the alleys."

"What did you do for a living?"

"Sold papers."



"How old are you?"

"I don't know; s'pose I'm 'bout thirteen; my pal said so."

"Can you read?" The boys looked at each other.

"Yes, sir."

"You may make your defence."

Miffins drew a long breath, and said all he had to say in it.

"Ain't got no defence to make. The boys wouldn't er done it without me, an' I told 'em how I'd seen it done in the Bowery shows, an' I read 'em how 'twas done in 'Jack the Pirate,' an' I *knew* how 'twas done in New York, an' I was the one as put 'em up to it, — but I didn't mean for Seth to be locked up — he didn't take the robe, an' he didn't know who took it either, — nor for Billy" (Miffins almost broke down there) "to take sick — an' I'm sorry."

The boy could say no more; he flushed and trembled. Harry and Jim sprang to their feet. "You sit down, Miffins," said Jim, peremptorily. "Harry, I'm going to have my say first." Parson Leonard shaded his eyes with his hand.

"Squire Slocum, I feel just as mean as dirt sitting here and hearing Miffins take all the blame on himself. Now he's told so on himself, I'm going to tell on myself, for 'tain't fair for him to bear the brunt of it all. He ain't strong



enough, and, and ” — Jim’s voice trembled, — “ he hasn’t any father and mother, and I’ve had a bringing-up and he hasn’t, and if I’d been in his place I know I should have done the same, and I’m a great deal worse than he, for I *knew* better, and I — I stole your robe, Deacon Simms, and Seth never knew who took it.”

Seth was roused by this last — his conscience gave an awful twinge, and he sprang to his feet, interrupting:

“ But I knowed ’twas *took*, and thet’s ez bad as takin’, ’n’ I’m durned ef I’ll set still ’n’ see Miffins shoulder all on’t. I allus hankered arter bein’ a pirate, ’n’ I wuz ez fierce ez any of ’em, ’n’ not half so brave.” Seth broke down in a substantial blubber.

“ Guess ’tis ’bout time fer the jury ter say suthin,” piped Barzy.

Lawyer Slocum smiled.

“ My halters ’n’ hold-back ain’t hurt none — ’n’ boys will be boys. I guess some on us recolleck when we wuz ’bout these boys’ age, er gittin’ up ’fore light ’n’ robbin’ old Squire Hazen’s hen-roost coz he’d broke up all the ice fer skatin’, so’s ter let his boom er logs come down the Branch, ’n’ I ain’t er goin’ ter fling no stones ’fore Thanksgivin’, neighbors.” And Barzy looked around inquiringly.

Lawyer Slocum spoke gravely:



“Before I came from home, my boy, Billy, owned up to me, and said, ‘Father, tell the boys we’re all to blame, and ask the jury to start us fair and square and give us a trial.’ And, friends and neighbors, it is, in the law, a first offence. I leave the case in your hands.”

“Please wait a minute, gentlemen,” said Nance, in her sweet, clear voice, “before you give your verdict. I’m Miffins’s friend,” — the boy’s heart fairly swelled within him, — “and I want to tell you that he was not to blame about my going away. I haven’t any father and mother either, but I *knew better*; — and when I was in New York and saw what I did that night, — Mr. Anstey will tell you if you want to know, for he and his mother were kindness itself to me, — I couldn’t blame Miffins or anybody else like him for thinking as he does, and I’ve been ashamed of myself for keeping silence all this while, and you may include me in your verdict, too, for I deserve it.”

If a bomb had fallen in their midst, the faces of those in the room could not have looked more amazed. Nancy Liscom and Mr. Anstey had known each other before!

“The jury will please step into the next room,” said Lawyer Slocum. And Barzy, Deacon Simms, Farmer Babcock, Joe, and Reuben Liscom slowly filed into the adjoining store. In



a few minutes back they came. Deacon Simms was spokesman.

"Squire Slocum, we've decided, seein' ez these boys air *our* boys, 'n' belong ter our village, that this their fust offence ain't ter be counted agin 'em. We've decided, too," he said, addressing Miffins, "thet you're one of our boys, too, from this time on, 'n' all we ask of you is ter try ter be an honor instid of a disgrace ter this place. Yer in good han's, — no better in this country, ef I do say it, Jacob, ter yer face, — 'n' now we want yer ter start fair 'n' make us proud of yer."

The boys drew a long breath. Then delicate Reuben Liscom spoke.

"I've no children of my own, neither has Jacob Foss, but between us we have Nancy and Miffins, and I know my niece will never do again what is not true and womanly," and he sat down, coughing violently. Nance put her arm around his neck and kissed him then and there, much to her uncle's surprise. The court was dismissed, and John Anstey, turning to speak to Nance, found she had fled.

"Is that you?" called Martha from the porch, as the wagon rumbled into the yard. There was only a frosting of snow as yet.

"Yes, Mrs. Foss, here we are, happy and hungry," replied Anstey, and Martha knew that the verdict had been for acquittal.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### *The 10.30 Mail*

ON the tenth of December, the 10.30 south-bound mail-bag from Barnet carried, among other letters, the following:

“THE ROOST, Dec. 9th, 189--.

“DEAR BURDEN: — I’ve been gathering myself together these first three weeks — striking root, as well as I can, the ground being frozen! This is why you have not heard from me. Thank you, old fellow, for the letters — they did me no end of good. I want you to come up later — when I have taken all my bearings.

“Here’s my day: up at 6.30, rake out my embers, hickory and hard maple; boil a pint of milk over them while dressing; heavy golf shoes and stockings, knickerbockers, white sweater, wool scull-cap; hot milk and brown bread, buttered (best of Jersey, unsalted!); build up a roaring fire, mercury hanging around zero; then off for a four-mile sprint, doing it now in fifty



minutes. Oh, but it's glorious! I walk on air, literally. Home and a plunge in my 'portable' before the fire; then breakfast, — good coffee, chunks of cream (I used to dream of this kind when I was in the fourth at St. Paul's), two eggs, the cackle of their laying still warm upon them, brown bread, and raised biscuit. Then school. I have but one session, nine to twelve, for four days only; and, curiously, Miffins, a newsboy waif whom these good people have taken, is the youngest; he is about thirteen. There are twenty-five in all, and not one a dunce. I have formed two Latin classes and one science class. On Friday, the fifth school day, I have the whole twenty-five come up to me in my den and take our 'literature' together. I get eight dollars a week for this! — and pay three for board, 'washing not included,' as the telegram ran. Boys and girls — co-eds in the true sense — pretty girls, too. But Nancy Liscom, an acquaintance of my mother's and a distant cousin of the Barnards, is by far the prettiest and cleverest.

“Home, two miles, for dinner with the family at twelve-thirty; then off with Jacob Foss — there isn't his like out of a book — to the woodlot, where I cut and hew à la Gladstone, till my circulation is assured for the next twenty-four hours. Back at the house by five; an hour's



reading, letters, papers, etc.; supper at six, and then, oh, bliss! slippers, shooting-jacket, a roaring fire, the dogs, and my one pipe!

"Miffins comes in for his Latin and other things about half-past seven — and abed at eight-forty-five! All of the windows open! How is that for a regimen?

"I can't begin to tell you of the people about here — you must see for yourself when you come; but it's as good as a serial story, — the whole thing. Snow has held off thus far; too cold; ten below this morning when I went out; sky deep blue — pines black against it — absolute silence for half an hour, then a chickadee broke it! I'm getting a hold on life in this hill country I've never had before.

"Kindest regards to your sister — the city life seems very far away just at present — and let me hear from you soon.

Yours,

"JOHN."

"HURDYVILLE, Vermont, Dec. 8th, 189--.

"MY DEAR MRS. ANSTEY: — Just to think that Mr. Anstey came up himself to settle matters! I saw him for the first time the day before Thanksgiving, when the jury met to decide about the boys who stole the things from the farmers. They were acquitted, not because they stole, but because it was a 'first offence,' and they belonged



to our village. I was just as proud of those little thieves as I could be! which sounds queer, but I mean it. Every boy was unwilling poor Miffins should take all the blame upon himself, and when the poor cripple stood up before all those men to confess, I saw how his leg, his best one, shook like a leaf, and he looked at Mr. Anstey just as if he were asking for help, and Mr. Anstey looked at him — oh, I can't tell you how! — but Miffins went right on and confessed he was the one to blame.

“I saw tears rolling down Mr. Leonard's face, — that's our minister, — and poor Barzy, an old farmer who lives alone on the mountain, sniffed and kept wiping the water from his eyes and nose with the back of his coat sleeve. Miffins stood up like a man, but he looked so pitiful with that dreadfully shrunken leg and twisted body, that I could have cried myself. But in a minute I had all I could do to keep from laughing out loud, for Seth — that's Deacon Simms's boy — broke down and blubbered, after saying he had always wanted to be a pirate! If you could see him! Fat, slow, sandy-haired, with pale blue eyes and white lashes, like a pig's — anything but a pirate in looks!

“School opened with fifteen boys and girls; now there are twenty-five, and only the second week.



"I go every day because Mr. Anstey is our teacher. I'm the only one who takes French. I'm taking Latin too. Miffins is the youngest, but he is almost the brightest. He has changed so much since he came here — not in looks, but in his ways and speech. We call him 'Mr. Anstey's shadow,' for you're pretty sure to see him wherever you see Mr. Anstey.

"Mrs. Foss is going to have a Christmas tree in her kitchen on Christmas eve, and I want to give Miffins a present, something from New York. I enclose a dollar of my own money, and would you be so kind as to buy him a pair of fur-lined kid gloves like Mr. Anstey's, about three sizes smaller? I heard him say he would like to be grown-up and earning money so that he might dress like Mr. Anstey. I'm going to help him to as far as I can, so I'll begin with the gloves.

"Everything is all smoothed out now Mr. Anstey is here. Billy is much better and will come to school after Christmas. With love,

"NANCY LISCOM."

"THE ROOST, Wednesday Evening.

"TO THE DEAREST WOMAN IN THIS WORLD!  
Fact, mother mine, although you had your doubts a year or two ago. Now I appeal to the dearest of her kind to help me out at both ends, — that is, Fifth Avenue and Beaver Tail.



“ I’ve put Mrs. Foss up to having a Christmas tree in her kitchen, — which you must see some-time, — and we’ve invited Miffins’s ‘ pals ’ in iniquity, Jim and Harry and Billy and Seth and Nancy Liscom, to come over to a grand goose dinner and help trim the tree for the evening, when we’ve asked the whole school up to the Roost; it’s to be a real neighborhood tree.

“ Of course, I want to make a lot of presents, — the right kind, — and you and father and Burden must help me out. I enclose this list; first as to books :

“ 4 ‘ Treasure Island ’ (Seth is to have one of these).

“ 4 ‘ King Arthur ’ — Sir Thomas Malory, you know (Miffins and Nance get two of these).

“ 6 ‘ Vision of Sir Launfal.’

“ 3 ‘ Huckleberry Finn.’

“ 8 ‘ Tom Brown at Rugby ’ (I must work these boys up to football by spring). Then, —

“ 8 of the best jack-knives you can find. (Father’ll know the kind I want.)

“ 3 golf sets.

“ 30 lbs. of Huyler’s mixed candies.

“ 1 box Florida oranges.

“ 10 hockey sticks.

“ These are for boys — but as for the girls — I’ll leave that to you. I suppose glove-boxes or ribbons or something like that would be suitable.



Come to think of it — I don't know as they have many gloves up here, but the ribbons would be all right.

“ I'll send you another word to-morrow. At present, to use Jacob Foss's expression, ‘ I'm so drove ’ I can't write another word.

“ Your devoted  
“ JOHN.”

“ HURDYVILLE, Vermont, Dec. 9th, 189--.

“ HI SPIKES : — I hear you're in an office and getting thirty dollars a month! Wish I was you, except that I've got so good a bunk here that I don't feel like leaving. Mr. Anstey told me he knew you, and you was in the office of one of his pals. I told him you was my pal for one winter. Do you mind it, Spikes? — the night before the Christmas shindy at the Home — how we laid in the Water Street alley in the heap of straw?

“ I've put inside of this a dollar, it's mine, and I want you to buy a good pair of suspenders — they're for Mr. Foss, the man I live with — and a white apron for Mrs. Foss, and send 'em to me through the mail. We're going to have a Christmas tree up at our house. I'm going up into the woods with Mr. Anstey to help cut it. Wish you was here with your old pal,

“ MIFFINS.



“P. S. I’m studying arithmetic and history and Latin, and if you hear of another place at thirty dollars a month within a couple of years, just let me know.”

“HURDYVILLE, Vermont, Dec. 9th, 189--.  
“TO THE SECRETARY OF THE  
NEWSBOYS’ HOME.

“DEAR SIR:—I enclose my check for three hundred dollars, to be expended in the usual Christmas treat for the boys. I send a box Christmas week, the contents of which have been contributed and made by the boys and girls of the district school of Hurdyville, Vermont. The prime mover in this contribution is Miffins, a crippled newsboy who used to sell papers in Park Row. Tell the boys this, and ask them if they remember Miffins; if they do, I know they’ll give a three times three, a rouser, in acknowledgment.

Yours truly,  
“JOHN ANSTEY.”



## CHAPTER XV.

### *In the Roost*

IT seemed as if Anstey, who had come to the Green Hills to fight for his life, had given new life to the whole village.

For three weeks before Christmas, there was nothing talked of but the Christmas tree at Mrs. Foss's. For three weeks every pair of knitting-needles in the village were in use, clicking and flying, for John had asked Miffins what would be the best gift for the newsboys, and he had answered promptly, "Mittens and mufflers." This was at once communicated to Nance, who spread it with enthusiasm, and soon, not only every girl in the school, but every girl's mother, aunts, and female cousins were engaged in the mitten and muffler industry. Even Jane Slocum contributed three pairs and a muffler. The result was one hundred pairs of mittens and thirty mufflers.

Harry and Seth, Jim and Miffins met two afternoons in one week, and cracked butternuts



till their hands were stained walnut color. But a half-bushel of the kernels was the result. Hearing of which, Mrs. Leonard opened wide her kitchen doors, and a half-dozen girls and boys made panful after panful of delicious butternut candy.

The whole school went into the woods on a crisp Saturday morning, and brought home a wood-sled load of birch bark. And that very evening, the best workers among the boys and girls, twelve in all, met in Anstey's den, and, while the apples sputtered and swelled before the hot coals of the fireplace, sat around the pine table and made boxes of birch bark, lined them with waxed paper, and filled them with layers of butternut taffy. John tied each box, as it was finished and filled, with a brown hemp cord, and attached a small birch-bark card to each, which read, "From 'The Roost' to 'The Home.'"

On another afternoon, the hills echoed to merry shouting and laughter, for Jacob had "hitched up double," and the jigger bore a load of boys and girls up into the woods beyond the back pasture, there to gather Christmas greens — ground pine, ground hemlock, and bittersweet.

Billy, who was just able to be about, wrote, at the suggestion of his father, a half-dozen notes to various farmers, asking for a bushel of apples; and five barrels of fine Northern Spies was the result of his effort.



Even Deacon Simms gave Seth twenty pounds of good maple sugar, in cakes, left over from the spring, and Seth appeared one bitter morning at the Roost, with a twenty-pound bag of maple sugar over one shoulder, and a half-bushel bag of hickory nuts, which he himself had gathered, slung over the other.

Martha Foss's heart and hands were full, and Jacob went about rubbing his horny ones with a peculiarly satisfied air.

"The Roost's er hummin', marm," he remarked, with a beaming face, on the day the boxes and barrels were sent off. "I ain't felt so young sence I wuz er boy; be sure 'n' hev 'nuff ter feed 'em, marm, the night er the party."

"Don't you worry 'bout *that*, father," said Martha, smiling. "Come here." She beckoned him into the pantry. "Look er there!" she exclaimed with pride.

Jacob laughed aloud.

"Yer dew beat all, Marthy, when yer git yer steam up! Le's count." And Jacob proceeded to count the good things on the broad pine shelves:

"Sixteen mince pies, ten pumpkin pies, two loaves er plum-cake, four loaves er marble cake, two ten-quart pans er nut-cakes, two milk-pails full er frosted seed-cookies, two biled hams, two roast turkeys, 'n' six chickens, three five-story



jelly-cakes — Jerusalem! This beats all creation, marm."

"An' that ain't *all*," said Martha, complacently. "I'm a-goin' ter give 'em angel cake 'n' whipped cream that night."

"Well, I won't worry any more 'bout fodder, Marthy. Guess we'll hev snow ter-night sure."

"I'll be glad on it," said Martha. "It'll seem more like Christmas."

Even as she spoke, out of a sky like lead, the snow began to fall; at first a stray flake, then a flurry, and, as night came on, it fell densely, steadily, straight as a plummet — blotting out roads, pastures, and woodlands, blanketing the Roost with white, shutting in Martha and Jacob and John Anstey and Miffins within the warm, glowing rooms, shutting out the night, as, one after the other, they went to the door and looked out.

"We'll hev ter break out roads by ter-morrer noon if this keeps on," said Jacob at supper.

"I suppose they won't send up anything from the station," said John Anstey. The gifts for the tree had not come.

"No, we'll hev ter go down ter-morrer ef we want anything," replied Jacob.

But by the next noon the roads were almost impassable; and the snow was still falling, but in swirls and whirls and blasts of icy particles,



for the mercury had fallen during the night and the wind risen, sweeping the snow into drifts and blocking the roads.

Jacob fidgeted all day, but Martha and John held him back, figuratively, by the coat-tails, and would not let him harness up to try his prowess in the drifts.

"If you'll wait, father, till it stops snowin', I won't hender, but I can't hev you goin' out in this storm," said Martha.

"Wal, wal, marm, hev your own way this time," said Jacob, a little testily.

All that night the storm continued. The wind howled in the chimneys, dashed the snow against the panes, roared beneath the eaves, and blocked the doors, assaulting the old farmhouse on every side, while warm and sheltered within, Jacob and Martha drew their cotton nightcaps over their ears and slept the sleep of the just. Miffins snuggled deep in the feather bed, dreaming pleasant dreams; John Anstey sat until midnight before the roaring fire, upon which a snow-flake fell now and then, hissing spitefully, thinking thoughts too deep for expression, but which ranged from Vermont to New York, from Beaver Tail to Fifth Avenue, from his fight for his life to Miffins and Nance and the boys and girls whom he taught each day; from Burden's pretty sister and the teas and dinners



and the dance at Sherry's, to the misery and want and wickedness of the East Side; from the lodgings for men and boys in the Bowery, where on bitter winter nights like this they were herded like cattle in pens, to Miffins in his snug little room across the passage. He rose and pulled aside the curtains at the west window. The panes were plastered white with snow.

"No sleeping with open windows to-night unless I want to wake in a snow-drift," he thought, and after raking together the coals and covering them with ashes, he turned in.

"No sprint for me, either," he said, as he woke the next morning and looked out. The snow had ceased. All the world was white. The sky, deep blue streaked with rose, heralded the coming sun. Anstey had awakened in a new world.

Something was coming up the road — turning into the yard. "A-hish, a-hish—Gee there!" piped a voice he recognized as Barzy's, and two noble oxen, their hides steaming, their breath forming vaporous clouds in front of them, hove into sight.

Martha and Jacob heard the welcome sound at the same moment. She flung open the porch door, and called out:

"Is that you, Barzy? However did you break through alone this mornin'?"



"Yes, it's me, Mrs. Foss," piped Barzy. "I wuz down ter the village yesterday, 'n' the stage brung up these boxes fer Mr. Anstey, 'n' I tuk 'em along home with me; fer, sez I, Jacob can't git down off er his hill ter-night, 'n' I scented Christmas er suthin' like it 'bout them boxes, 'n' I thought I might jest ez well break out this end o' the hill road this mornin' as t'other; so I brung 'em over."

"Well, Barzy, yer beat me this time. I'd er ben thar las' night sure pop, but I wuz dretful henpecked 'bout thet time. Marthy wouldn't let me go, nohow."

"Wal, I hain't no women folks ter henpeck me — but I don't deny, Jacob, thar ain't spells when I'd ez live be henpecked ez not." And Barzy laughed shrilly.

"The poor soul," said pitiful Martha, and proceeded to make an extra quart of her best coffee. "Barzy!" she called, as Jacob and he were unloading the boxes, despite Anstey's protestations to wait till he was dressed. "Barzy!"

"Yes, Miss Foss."

"You come right in an' have your breakfast 'fore you think er breakin' out any farther; we're jest ready to set down."

So Barzy sat down and was warmed and fed and made much of, to his supreme satisfaction.



He promised to come with his fiddle for the evening. Then he and Jacob started out to break a road to the village.

"It's lucky we cut this tree three days ago, Miffins," said Anstey. "We couldn't get so far as the home pasture this morning, not without my snowshoes. I've sent for two pairs. I think they are in one of the boxes. We'll get the covers off, and wait for the rest to unpack."

He dragged the noble fir into the kitchen, and set it up in the socket he had made for it. How strong and sturdy and well-developed it stood there, its topmost branches crowding the ceiling! In a few minutes the room was filled with the fragrance of the balsam. Miffins helped set the table for the dinner-party, while Anstey cleared the room for company.

They were busy at work, for there was much to be done, when the merry jingle of sleigh-bells rang out on the still air, and Lawyer Slocum drove his double sleigh into the yard, and out from beneath the robes of buffalo and fox sprang Nance and Billy and Jim and Harry and Seth.

"We've come early, Mrs. Foss," cried Nance, "because we knew you would need help in the Roost to-day. Merry Christmas! — I've said it first!" she cried.

Then such a shouting of "Merry Christmas" as there was! And when Nance had flung her



arms around Martha's neck and kissed her heartily, Jim Leonard said he would not be out-done by a girl in "good will" on Christmas day, and therewith gave Martha such a resounding kiss that Harry and Billy immediately followed suit, and Seth, screwing his courage to the sticking-point, sidled up to Martha, and in his shyness planted a kiss on the tip end of her nose. At which none laughed more heartily than Martha, who placed her hand lovingly on poor, awkward Seth's shoulder, and said:

"I'm so glad you could come, Seth, an' I hope you'll be able to stay all day."

Such a Christmas dinner as that was! They one and all declared there never was such a roast goose before. Never had they eaten such stuffing of raisins and apples. Never had they tasted such plum-pudding. Never had they eaten such pumpkin pie, and never, no, never, had they had such appetites with which to eat it. And Martha's heart was rejoiced, and Jacob's eyes were gladdened at the sight of the happy faces around the table, none happier than Miffins, who sat quietly between Anstey and Martha, and wondered how it had all come about.

And Nance, too, was so merry and bright — so helpful in every way. She donned Martha's checked gingham apron, and served the table as if she had been a trained waitress, to Martha's



infinite amazement, and Anstey's amusement. She and Miffins washed the dishes afterward, while the boys helped John bring in the presents.

After that, until five o'clock, no finger was idle in the old Roost, and when at six the whole party, in a jigger on runners, drawn by four horses, wheeled into the yard, amid shouts and laughter and the blowing of tin horns, and drew up at the porch door, the old farmhouse had been transformed.

The newcomers did not come empty-handed, and each one brought some contribution to the general fund of happiness.

What a sight greeted their eyes as they trooped into the kitchen!

There were wreaths of ground pine and bitter-sweet at every window, and garlands of the same looped from door to window, from window to shelf all around the rooms. At the sitting-room end, towered the tree ablaze with colored candles, its sturdy branches drooping but little under the weight of the many gifts, its rich, dark-green contrasting so pleasantly with the vari-colored boxes and books and ribbons. The dining-room table had been removed to Anstey's room, and that stood, together with the pine table, covered with soft green moss, upon which were piled pyramids of oranges and stacks of frosted seed-cakes and nut-cakes. In the centre, on a bread-



board covered with green tissue paper, stood a noble pink-frosted plum-cake, Martha's masterpiece, and flanking it in wooden plates (such as bakers use) was the whole tribe of pies.

At one end, in a large kneading-tray, lay the turkey and chickens, trussed with green. At the other end, on another board, was a huge ham. There were piles of bread and butter in work-baskets borrowed for the occasion, and the angel cake and whipped cream hovered, cloud-like, in the distance on a small side-table.

Never in its hundred and ten years of existence had the old farmhouse seen such an evening. Knowing that the young people would enjoy their supper better after their curiosity as to their presents had been satisfied, John and Miffins and Nance began to give them out among "Ohs" and "Ahs" innumerable.

There was such an opening and shutting of jack-knives; such a trying on of neckties; such a matching of ribbons with eyes blue, black, or brown; such excited discussions over the hockey-sticks; such an opening and shutting of books as the Roost had never witnessed before. The little candles were burning low before the gifts had received half the admiration intended for them, and an invitation from Anstey to blow them out was generally accepted, and furnished sport for all.



Then they trooped into Anstey's den, and again the "Ohs" and "Ahs" broke loose, and Jacob was in his glory, dispensing cold turkey and chicken with a generous hand, while Anstey carved the ham.

Nance was the embodiment of the Christmas spirit that evening. Her gray eyes fairly danced with joy, her cheeks were red with health and excitement, her dress, on which she had spent much labor and care, was very becoming, and girl-like, she knew it. It was of white serge, — a gift from Mrs. Anstey, — with a belt and collar of pale-blue silk. Every eye followed her with pleasure, as she deftly and quietly served first this one, then that, her sweet voice and merry laugh sounding joyously above the chatter and exclamations.

Martha seemed to have lost the power of speech as well as locomotion. John Anstey had placed her in his big armchair, and old and young vied with each other to spoil her with attentions.

She found time, however, to pull Miffins into the pantry and take his small face between her hands and kiss it, whispering, "My dear boy, this apron is more to me than all the rest." And this time Miffins did not put up the back of his hand to wipe it off. The pantry was dark, — he put up both arms, steadying himself on his crutch, and gave Martha Foss such a hug that the breath was nearly squeezed from her plump little body.



To Miffins's surprise it wasn't half so hard to give that squeeze and receive that kiss as he had supposed — and he began to wish he might have one from Nance, she looked so sweet in her white dress. So he watched his opportunity. It came sooner than he had anticipated; for before he could get out of the pantry, Martha having hurried away upon hearing her name called, in flew Nance for an extra basketful of cookies.

She gave a little shriek as she saw Miffins.

"Oh, goodness! How you frightened me! What are you in here for?"

"I say, Nance."

"Well, say, I'm in a hurry."

"Those gloves were A No. 1."

"Yes, I knew they were — that's why I got them for you."

"And, Nance — hold on a minute;" he laid his hand on her arm.

"It's you that are holding on — what do you want, anyway?"

"This is better'n the circus dress," he said, pointing to her white serge.

"Of course it is, you little gander — anybody can see that."

"I say, Nance —"

"For gracious sake, say ahead and let me go."

"You ain't laid it up against me, have you, that New York scrape?"



"Laid it up against you!" repeated Nance in amazement. "Why, of course I haven't."

"Well, Mrs. Foss ain't, either, 'n' *she* gave me a kiss just now in here, an' I thought as how — perhaps — I didn't know —"

Nance interrupted him with a merry laugh. "You thought I'd give you another! So I will," she added, promptly popping a kiss down on the astonished boy's head. "There, now, that's for sending me off to New York — it was the best thing that ever happened to me," and off she flew, leaving a rather dazed specimen of boyhood in the pantry.

The long kitchen had been cleared of chairs and tables while the young people were feasting in Anstey's room, and, after the supper, they formed in two long lines for the Virginia reel, Jacob leading with Nance, and Anstey at the foot with Martha. Barzy tuned up with the "Campbells are coming," and away went Jacob and his partner to meet Anstey and his. That was dancing! No sliding and slipping and gracefully walking through a mock country dance, but a real old-fashioned Virginia reel, steps and bows and twists and turns all performed to the letter. Martha was soon breathless, and was led into the den by her escort, who aided her in clearing up while the rest danced. Jacob kept on to the very end, and danced as if strung on wires.



Barzy's fiddle gave out at last on the "Campbells," and "Money Musk" took its place, which sent a thrill of new life through the long line of the reel.

At last, panting, breathless, flushed, the partners bowed for the last time, and voted a rest of ten minutes.

Soon, however, before the ten minutes were over, a chorus of voices arose:

"Your promise, Mr. Anstey, your promise!"

"When you're ready, I am," said Anstey, smiling down into the eager faces.

"We're ready, we're ready! Hurrah for the 'Christmas Carol,'" shouted Jim Leonard, and they trooped again into John's room, from which the table had disappeared, and seats had been provided for part; the rest sat on the rugs, and John took up his place by the fire, and read by its bright light.

How still it was as he began! And how breathless, almost, as he went on. He had promised this Christmas story, at first to the Dickens Club, which had been formed among the older boys and girls, then to the whole school. And now the whole school was living over the experiences of Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, and Tiny Tim.

The old clock in the passage struck eleven just as John Anstey closed with the loveliest Christmas words that were ever penned: "God bless



us every one." In the silence that followed there were lumps in more throats than Miffins's, the only crippled Tiny Tim in their midst.

Jacob rose, and laying a hand on Anstey's shoulder, and one on Miffins's, who was on the rug beside him, said solemnly, with trembling voice, "God bless us every one." "Amen," said Martha and John Anstey.

Then, to break the hush that had fallen upon the merry voices, Anstey proposed that they all sing "America," Barzy leading with the fiddle. How they sang!

"God bless our native land,  
Firm may she ever stand  
Through storm and night."

Then Jacob must needs quaver forth "Marching through Georgia," in which voices and boots joined in a rousing chorus; and Martha wanted the "Old Oaken Bucket" twice over, and when Lawyer Slocum made his appearance at the porch, calling, "Time! the thermometer's looking blue," they greeted him with "We Won't Go Home Till Morning," and kept it up till they were nearly smothered in the robes of the jigger and sleigh; then rousing hurrahs, three times three, echoed among the hills, for Jacob Foss and Martha, for Mr. Anstey and Barzy, and last a regular wild-cat howl for Miffins, which he answered with a true "Extra" yell.



"Well, I'm about tuckered out," sighed Martha, contentedly, as she sank into a chair in the chaotic kitchen.

"Gi'n out, marm? Wal, I'd like ter go right through the hull party agin, 'n' begin right now!" And Jacob slapped his thigh while his feet kept time to the echoes of "Money Musk" that were still ringing in his ears.

Martha laughed heartily. "I never see sech a man as Jacob, Mr. Anstey; he ain't more'n a boy in his heart, an' never will be if he lives to be a hundred. — What be you doin', Mr. Anstey?"

"Just clearing up a little, Mrs. Foss. We'll put the furniture back in its place, and you go to bed and rest you."

"I dunno but I will," sighed Martha, murmuring to herself, "I never see sech a man!" But this time it was the boarder she designated thus.

As John and Miffins put the last piece in its place the clock struck twelve.

"Tired, Miffins?"

"Yes, sir, some."

"Look up here."

The boy looked up with all his boy's heart in his eyes:

"It's been great, sir; the Christmas shindy at the Home ain't in it."

"Good-night, Miffins," said Anstey, with a smile.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### *In Camp*

GOOD comradeship between teacher and pupils, a Dickens class that met in the den once in two weeks, glorious moonlight toboggan slides (introduced by Anstey) down the hill road, hockey on the crust, Canadian snow-shoeing over fence and wall, two weeks' skating on the level reaches of the Branch, and solid work during the one session of school, filled the short winter days and long evenings to overflowing.

Miffins had astonished Anstey. The boy put himself to study with a will and energy that would have threatened his health, had not his friend and teacher found ways for much out-of-door life for him. Crippled as he was, all sports were denied to him, and it was impossible in the bitter weather for him to stand about to watch the other boys.

Anstey gave two hours every afternoon to felling trees or chopping wood in the wood lot, and Miffins was with him, working with saw and



hatchet to clear away branches. Thus he came to be learned in woodcraft, — empty nests, squirrel-holes, coon-hollows, grain and bark, and knowledge of the wonderful anatomy of all the forest trees. Once in awhile he tobogganed alone with Anstey, who dared not risk the dangerous sport with him in a crowd. Regularly every school morning, John drew him on the small wood-sled to school, and at twelve drew him home again. This close companionship with the man who stood to him for all that was manly was Miffins's best education.

By February he had outstripped the first year Latin class, and his mathematics were a wonder to John as well as to the others. Nancy patronized him no longer. She confided to her Aunt Liscom that Miffins was becoming a gentleman, like Mr. Anstey.

Now John Anstey had never made one suggestion to Miffins since the night he had held him in his arms and literally taken the waif to his heart. But he had read with him old Sir Thomas Malory's "King Arthur," and talked over the lives and deeds of the Knights of the Round Table. The boy had seen so much of evil in his short life that Anstey never shunned the discussion of it with him, but treated it in a human way, and constantly showed his own preference for the nobler knights.



He tried his best to find out who was Miffins's favorite, but the boy was shy, even with him, of showing his feelings, and John did not press him. To Dickens, Miffins was devoted; ever since the night Anstey had read the "Christmas Carol," Miffins had spent the little spare time he had in devouring one Dickens book after another; "Oliver Twist," for whom he had a fellow feeling; "Pickwick Papers," over which he shouted with glee, and "Old Curiosity Shop," over certain chapters of which he felt very lumpy in his throat.

Before the boys and girls of the district school could realize it, the winter term was over and two weeks' vacation gave them time to help at home in "sugaring," a staple industry in the Green Hills.

On the twentieth of March, Jacob heard a faint "caw, caw." "The first crow, marm," he said, coming into the kitchen with a new-born lamb in his arms, which he deposited in a basket near the stove.

"Thet means spring's er comin' within the nex' month. 'Bout time ter soak out the sap pails 'n' tubs; we'll need 'em all ef this weather holds. Guess I'll git 'em out now. Ever done any sugarin', Mr. Anstey?"

"No, sir — but I've always wanted to ever since I read about it when I was a boy."

"Wal, ther'z plenty er work fer all, once the



sap gits ter runnin'. I'll want yer two han's too, sonny; they're mighty good ones ter handle spigots."

"What's a spigot?" said Miffins.

Jacob laughed. "I thought yer'd larned 'bout all ther wuz ter larn this winter from Mr. Anstey, but I guess Jacob Foss can larn both on ye sugarin'. I'll set yer both ter work makin' spigots this forenoon, 'n' this arternoon we'll go up ter the sugar-house 'n' look things over."

The sugar-house stood in the woods just off from the wood-road as it crossed the back pasture to the summit of Beaver Tail. Its walls were of rough spruce battened with strips of pine. It was about ten by fourteen feet, roofed with spruce bark; on one side wide swing-doors opened to the south.

There was a stone fireplace at one end. Directly in front of the hut, at a distance of some fifteen feet, were three circles of rough stones and three iron crotches set firmly over them. From these were to swing the huge sap-kettles which Jacob had brought up with him, besides a load of sap buckets, tubs, and pails.

It was a fine March day in those mountain regions. A warm, brilliant sun, and a crisp air joined to make life a delight at that altitude, nineteen hundred feet above sea level. The savage in Anstey longed to be one with such a



free life, and Miffins, too, wished he might stay up there and "camp out."

"This is better than an Adirondack camp, Miffins — I'll tell you what we'll do," — John was as eager as a boy, — "we'll bring up some fixings and sleep up here during the 'sugaring-off,' and tend the fires and kettles for Mr. Foss."

"Oh, bully! and bring the guns?" said Miffins.

"Of course," laughed Anstey; "they belong to a camp — although there won't be much to shoot, I fancy."

"And will we cook our own things?"

"Oh, yes, coffee and bacon and that sort of thing — the rest we shall have to ask Mrs. Foss to provide."

"When can we begin?"

"We'll ask Mr. Foss; it will depend on him."

Jacob had been off in the woods testing first one tree, then another.

"It's time we wuz at work," he said. "It's er goin' ter freeze nights 'n' thaw days, 'n' thet's sugar weather — feel the snow," and he caught up a lump of water-soaked snow and handed it to Anstey. "'Tain't so deep in the woods but thet we can git round all right."

"Then we can carry out our plan to-morrow, can't we?" Anstey laid it before him.

Jacob slapped his thigh in his delight.

"Wal, thet's er good 'un — ter think of er



city chap er leavin' his good bed 'n' camping down up on the mountin! What'll Marthy say? I'm feared she'll be agin it—it's ketchin' weather." By which Jacob intended to intimate that colds might be in order for those who slept out o' nights.

"We'll try it, anyway, Mr. Foss."

"Wal, it'll be a soft snap, ez you boys say, fer me," replied Jacob. "I've tended sap-kettles fer thirty year, 'n' 'tain't all play. I'm willin' 'nuff ter hev a restin' spell."

But there was no "resting-spell" for any one during the next eight days.

The sap began to run under the influence of the northward-turning sun, and pails and buckets were in constant use.

Seven hundred fine sugar maples were tapped and tended, and the yield was enormous.

John Anstey wrote to Burden that he enjoyed it better than the tall-game stalking in the Rockies, in which he had indulged the year before.

There was a good floor to the sugar-house, and Martha had sent up two feather beds, six blankets, two comforters, and two buffalo-robcs. These they put upon burlap-bottoms fastened on large cleats to the side of the hut. At night the water skimmed with ice in the one wooden sap-bucket they used for their ablutions, and both of them drew their woollen tams over their ears



and down to their eyes, and, burrowing in the blankets, comforters, and buffalo robes, slept famously.

They had the dogs with them. They slept with them as foot-warmers. The guns were in the rack they had hung up on the back wall, and a coffee-pot and tin cups and plates completed their outfit.

They kept the fires by raking the ashes over them about ten at night, and in the morning it was the work of a few minutes to boil the water, make the coffee, and poach eggs over the glowing under coals.

Potatoes were roasted in the most approved manner among the hot stones, and steak and chops done to a turn on the heated slabs, which John had found in an old stone wall up in the pasture.

Jacob appeared regularly at half-past seven, and from that time, Anstey and Miffins had not one moment of idleness until six at night.

Jacob and John brought in the buckets of sap by means of yokes, and Miffins tended the fires and looked to the sap in the kettles, that it did not boil over.

It was in the evening after seven and before ten, that John and Miffins, stretched on the buffalo-robes before the blazing fire, that sent the shadows dancing about in the bare maples above



and around them, came to know each other intimately.

John had noticed that the boy, earnest as ever in his work and whole-hearted in his play, had grown more quiet of late, just before the sugaring. Sometimes he had watched him, when the others were at their sports, and seen him turn from all the fun and peg away into the schoolroom to busy himself with his books. When Nance, or Billy, or Jim came up to the Roost and made merry with Mrs. Foss in the kitchen, he had watched the boy join with them for awhile, and then quietly disappear, leaving the others to their fun. Oftenest, he found him on the rug in his den before the fire, apparently in deep thought. Anstey had never questioned him as to what might be the cause of this — but he had seen a fine light in the boy's eyes and a wistful look on his face when he read with him the tales of prowess of the Knights of the Round Table. He determined to sound him sometime when the opportunity presented.

It had come now, he felt sure.

“A penny for your thoughts, Miffins,” he said, pleasantly, one night when Miffins had been silent for a full half-hour, staring into the fire as if he saw nothing of its dancing light, so moody was his look.

The boy looked up, — but Anstey was smoking



tranquilly, his hands under his head, gazing up into the fantastic network of branch and bough above him, — then he looked back into the fire.

“Are there many fellows in New York like me?” he asked, in a low voice.

Anstey took the pipe from his mouth. “Well, no, very few, I think. They don’t take to books as you do.”

“I didn’t mean that, I meant like me — you know; like this here.” He indicated his shrunken leg.

“Oh, yes, — in a large city there must be.”

“There don’t seem to be any up here.”

“Well, no, I’ve noticed that myself.”

“What do the fellows do in the city that are like me?”

“That’s a poser, Miffins. I don’t know.”

“You don’t see them round much?”

“Well, no, can’t say that I do.”

“And you don’t see ’em in the country?”

“No.”

“Well, *where* are they?”

John Anstey waited a moment before he spoke; he thought he was beginning to get the drift of the boy’s thought; still, he was not sure.

“Well, Miffins, I take it for granted they are fighting in the ranks with the rest of us—I know of one in Yale, and Spikes is in the office, and you are here. That is the extent of my acquaint-



ance with fellows that are handicapped as you are."

"Handicapped!" Miffins repeated in a scornful voice — "handicapped and leg-capped and every other capped. You know yourself, Mr. Anstey," — he turned almost fiercely upon John, who was knocking the ashes out of his pipe, preparatory to refilling, for he allowed himself two while in camp,—"it ain't no use to try to fight in the ranks with a twisted leg and a screwed back! I'm going to give it up."

"And be a coward. Well, that's one way of looking at it," said Anstey, quietly. "But I never saw it in that light."

"Of course you can't, because you ain't me. It makes me mad to see the fellows play hockey and toboggan, and it makes me madder to see you start off for your 'sprint,' and I don't know what I'm mad at either; it keeps me mad all the time. I heard Mr. Foss call me once a 'half a boy,' and I vowed then I'd make him take that back sometime, but there ain't any use. I'll be stumpy all my life and — and — I wish I was dead!"

For answer Anstey drew his little worn copy of old Malory from his pocket, and read of Sir Galahad, his favorite knight, and his deeds of prowess.

When he had finished, Miffins lifted his head



and looked at him as if he were going to speak — then looked again into the fire without a word.

“There is one thing, Miffins; handicapped, or leg-capped, as you say, you’re bound to be a man, and I can’t see but what you’ve got to make your fight like other men; there’s Sir Galahad now —”

“What’s the use of talking about Sir Galahad? I can’t do great things the way he did!”

“I know you can’t do them in the way he did them — but you may be able to do them, just the same, in *your* way.

“I don’t know that I can make it plain to you — but if I speak about myself, you may see into it a bit. When I left college I hadn’t decided upon anything; my father was rich, I had plenty of my own. I’d had everything an American boy can have, and we have more than boys of any other country. I didn’t want to be a doctor, nor a minister, nor a lawyer, nor a merchant. I hadn’t anything to push me into any kind of work, for my three meals a day were always there, and nobody to support. I suppose you think that’s a soft place for a man twenty-three years old to be in — but I can tell you it makes any man that is a man feel pretty blue at times. *You* don’t know anything of that sort of ‘blue devils,’ for all you have just wished you were dead! To get up in the morning and to know that every earthly thing is provided for you, to dress and get out —



somewhere — to see a lot of men about you who are lucky enough to be so born as to *have* to work — I don't care whether it's a truck-driver, or hod-carrier, or a minister, or a merchant — and to know you can't get into their place, no matter what you do, — it's enough to drive a man mad sometimes." Anstey paused. He was reticent about himself as a rule, and the breaking of it even with this boy was not easy.

He pulled away at his pipe for a few minutes, wondering if Miffins would ask a question. But the boy was still looking into the fire, so he went on:

"I've known the time I'd have been glad to exchange places with you in Park Row." Miffins looked up in amazement. Anstey nodded.

"Yes, I got all off the track, you see, not having anything to do. One day, five years ago, just about this time it was, I went into Trinity — you know it — to hear Phillips Brooks — that's the photograph on the wall in the den — " Anstey interrupted himself here. "Some day, Miffins, I hope, a good, great man will cross your path as that man crossed mine — a man whom you can love and reverence, and who stirs your heart as this air quickens your blood and makes you strong to work." (Miffins had his own thoughts just at this moment.) "That's the way the college men looked on Doctor Brooks. On that



day, I sat down feeling pretty blue, and he gave us such a talk that I — well, I went to work the next day. I'd been blind, that's all there is about it; and my work lay right around me, and I hadn't seen it."

"What was it?" asked Miffins.

"I think I won't tell you that just now — it can wait. Only, I went into it heart and soul, and just as I got ready to do what I thought would help all round — I was told to stop it, and fight — for, you know what. But the queer part is, that since I recovered my eyesight, that day five years ago, I find work wherever I look — and I couldn't be idle again if I wanted to.

"Now, the trouble is with you, you're blind, too; but some day you'll see, and then there won't be any more wishing you were dead, because you'll want so much to live, as I do."

"But what *can* I do?" persisted Miffins.

"Well, for one thing, you're not brain-capped, say what you will. You can make your living easily by your brains, and if you handle yourself right, — get yourself into good training, you know, — you'll be first at the goal, sure."

"Think so?" asked Miffins, eagerly.

"I *know* it," said John, emphatically. "Here, stir up that fire, will you, at your end? It's getting shivery, and time to turn in. You know we're to be up for all night to-morrow — Great Scott! What's the matter with the dogs!"



Siegfried and Freya, with Fidget in tow, had been off for their usual evening ramble in the woods and across the pasture, nosing about wood-chuck holes, scratching at a rabbit-burrow, stirring up a wood-pussy now and then to their keen regret.

Generally all three came bounding into camp with every evidence of having had a lark. But to-night they came creeping in almost on their bellies; shivering and whining, they crawled up to Anstey and Miffins and cowered trembling close beside them. Fear — deadly fear — was evident in every movement.

Anstey reached instinctively for his gun, and gave the other to Miffins.

“Stay with the dogs, Miffins. I’ll not go far, but something’s up.” He came back in about ten minutes.

“I can’t understand it,” he exclaimed. “There isn’t a sound to be heard but the crackling of the fires, nor a track but the dogs’ to be found. They act as if they had seen spooks. We’ll have to protect them to-night. We’ll build up the fires and stoke till daylight.”

They built up the three fires, left the wide door of the sugar-house open, and turned in. The dogs were not content to lie at their feet, but crept up farther and farther toward the faces of the two, until the soft heads lay beside the



tam-o'-shanters. Anstey lay awake with his eardrums strained to bursting until the first streak of light in the east. And Jacob found them asleep when he came up at half-past seven, and geyed them unmercifully on their powers of endurance.

There had been an enormous flow of sap the last two days, and it required night work to handle it. All day they worked, bringing in the sap and boiling it down. As darkness fell, Jacob began to look anxious.

"I hain't hired in no extra hand this year coz I thought there'd be er plenty, seein' ez you offered," he said to John, "but," pointing to the vats filled with unboiled sap, "I don't see my way out this time. It'll mean a loss of nigh onter a hundred dollars, if I can't use that sap, 'n' ther'z more'n seventy pails in the woods now."

It was past six and Jacob was hungry, and when he was hungry he was apt to be a little disheartened. John, knowing this, said:

"You've worked all day like a dray-horse, Mr. Foss, and there you stand with the yoke still on your neck. Here, take it off and sit down on this buffalo-robe for awhile. I'll make the coffee, and I'm sure Mrs. Foss has something good in that pail that she sent up."

Jacob's face brightened.

"Guess er cup er coffee would go 'bout ter the right spot. I ain't so young ez I wuz when



them trees wuz leetle more'n saplin's. Hark! What them dogs barkin' at?"

Mingled with the joyful barking of the dogs, far down the hillside could be heard faint shouts and calls. Nearer and nearer the sounds drew — laughter and merry chatter were distinguishable. Then a call:

"Hallo, there in camp!"

The hills reëchoed, "Hallo-lo —"

Anstey let loose a genuine Yale yell, and Mif-fins was not behindhand in exercising the full power of his newsboy's lungs.

Soon the flare of pine torches and the twinkle of lanterns were visible, and the merry crowd that carried them. The whole school had come up to help Jacob with his Herculean task and have some fun as well. Three of the stoutest — Jim and Seth and the oldest boy in school — were drawing Martha Foss on a wood-sled, and two more tugged away, for the snow lay in patches only, at another sled, well-piled with tin pails, pans, and boxes. Barzy had been over to the Roost early, and Martha had confided to him Jacob's burden in regard to getting in the sap. Barzy had offered to come over for chores in the evening, and meanwhile had spread Jacob's dilemma in the village. Nance and Jim had done the rest.

Jacob's face fairly beamed with delight.



“Job’s rooster, marm! You ain’t been up here a-sugarin’ sence you wuz Nance’s age, ’n’ come with me — hey?” And then and there he helped her from the sled with all the gallantry of his youth, and gave her a kiss before them all.

Martha’s pink cheeks burned rose-red:

“I declare for’t, father, ef I’d er known you wuz er goin’ ter act like a boy, I’d stayed to home.”

“No, yer wouldn’t, marm, no, yer wouldn’t; I know yer better! Now let’s see what yer’ve got fer supper. It came jest in the nick er time. T’other pail looked kinder skinchin’ fer three, ’n’ I wuz beginnin’ ter feel er leetle mite down. I say, all on you young folks, three cheers fer Martha Foss ’n’ the fodder!” Jacob threw up his cap like a boy.

How the woods rang and the hills echoed to the rousing three times three!

Martha had brought up the coffee ready made in a fifteen-gallon milk-can, and Miffins let it come to a boil in one of the smaller sap-kettles. The squash and pumpkin pies he heated on the flat slabs which kept hot all day among the embers and stones. Such a feast as they had! The whole party sat about on logs, or on the floor of the sugar-house, and held their tin cups of smoking coffee in one hand, and doughnuts and cheese, or pie and cheese, or cookies and cheese,



or cheese and gingerbread, in the other, enjoying their keen appetites, the crisp air, and the glorious warmth of the blazing fires.

“Now, all han’s to work!” cried Jacob, as the tin cups rattled into the milk-can, and the few remnants of pie and doughnuts were flung to the dogs. For the next two hours the woods rang with merry voices, and the shadows danced around the tree-trunks and high overhead among the branches, and boys and girls sped hither and thither, themselves like dancing shadows, in and around the sugar-house.

It looked like a witches’ trysting-ground. The huge caldrons swung over the roaring fires — the girls with long, black ladles skimming and stirring. Now and then, a little shriek from one or another rose above the voices, as the hot syrup boiled over the edge and hissed among the flames, before the girls could pour in the cold sap.

The boys, under Jacob and Anstey as captains, formed into companies to bring in the sap-pails from the woods, one of each squad bearing a large pine-torch, and flitting with it from tree to tree.

At last, about ten o’clock, the last sap-bucket had been brought in, the fires were in fine blast, and the kettles in full swing. The whole party formed a semicircle before the fires, and the cry went up, “A story, Mr. Anstey, a story.”

“What shall it be?” he asked.



"Something like 'Treasure Island,'" said Seth, eagerly, and for some reason unknown to Seth, the whole school shouted.

"Something exciting about the streets of New York," said Jim.

"Oh, Mr. Anstey, tell us about the balls and parties," cried two of the older girls, at which the boys groaned heavily.

"I say, let's get Mr. Anstey to tell us about his hunting in the Rocky Mountains last year," suggested Miffins.

"Hooray!" shouted Billy, "that's the thing—all about bears, an' gulches, an' guides, an' cowboys, an' wolves."

"I'll put it ter vote," said Jacob. "All in favor of shootin' big game in the Rockies say 'Aye.'"

A resounding "Aye" was the answer. "Contrary minded?" Silence.

"It's er vote," said Jacob. "Git up steam, Mr. Anstey, 'n' go ahead."

"By the way, have you any bears about here now, Mr. Foss?" John asked the question carelessly.

"B'ars! Bless ye, no. Yer won't see er b'ar this side er the peak. The last one was killed just er year ago, in that clearin' jest over the summit, the one I p'inted out t'other day."

Nancy appeared to be very busy skimming



the third kettle, but lost no word of the stories that followed of big horn and grizzly. "But," Anstey concluded, after holding the attention of his audience for twenty minutes, "the worst thing to encounter is the puma. It lies out on a branch, and drops on its prey with the swiftness of a thunderbolt. I've never met one, and I've no desire to. My guide told me of an adventure he had in Idaho on the Pacific slope of the Rockies. He was literally pounced upon by a puma in a tree above him, as a cat pounces on a mouse. He escaped by the skin of his teeth, but he showed me the mark of the great cat's claws in his shoulders. But I should like to trap a bear in Vermont!"

"Wal, yer won't git the chance this year. We're too civilized 'roun' here fer thet sort er game; woodchucks, or a coon, or fox is 'bout all we can brag of. — What time's the jigger comin' fer yer?" he asked the boys.

"About half-past eleven," said Jim.

"Wal, then yer'd better be gittin' 'long toward the Roost in 'bout half 'n hour. I'll stay up here, Marthy, 'n' make er night on it; it's the last, 'n' now we've got jest time fer sugarin' off a leetle 'fore yer go. Bring in the snow, boys. Marm, yer can tend that kettle over thar."

The boys needed no urging. They sought out the patches of snow, and brought in a half-dozen



sap-pails full. They gathered about Nancy, who, as mistress of ceremonies, was in her element. She tested the syrup, and, dipping up a small ladleful at a time, poured it out upon the snow that was heaped in the pails. It cooled in a few seconds, and then fingers and mouths worked together in a silence that was broken only by satisfied "Ohs!" and "Ahs!"

John wrote Burden that it was food fit for the gods, and, waxing eloquent over the remembrance of the saccharine delicacy, termed it the "chilled essence of imprisoned summer," and Burden's mouth watered, as he read, to such an extent that he determined to "sugar off" with Anstey and Jacob Foss the next year.

After their feast, Martha was packed carefully upon the sled, and, with merry good nights, the sugar-makers lighted torches and lanterns and were off down the wood-road.

Jacob and John took turns in tending the fires and the kettles, and in the morning there was a goodly showing for the night's work. Camp was broken that forenoon, and John declared that, so soon as settled spring weather should come, he should make the sugar-house into a real camp, and spend all his nights there during the summer. He had formed his plans already for the coming season, but kept them to himself.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### *The Still Hunt*

“JUST as soon as the ground settles, we must lay out a tennis court back of the school-house,” said Anstey to the boys one morning at recess, a few days after the “sugaring-off.”

“Then there are some fine golf courses in the back pasture; we must get at those too; and I suppose you Rugbyites want to form a football eleven? We’ve work enough laid out for us, besides two books of Virgil this term.”

“We’ve decided to have white sweaters,” said Billy, who was an enthusiastic football player in prospective, “and mother said she’d work a beaver’s tail in brown yarn on the breast of each, for we’re going to be called the Beaver Tail Team. We’ve chipped in for pads and things. Who’ll we challenge first, Mr. Anstey?”

“Supposing we train awhile, before deciding that?” replied Anstey, smiling to himself at the thought of all the scrimmages and sore elbows and barked shins and humiliated half-backs and



quarter-backs that must be endured and lived through before they could rush another team, even of their own size.

Billy sighed. "I can't wait to begin. I've been kicking for the last month, and I kicked myself clear over the other day trying the drop. I've read everything you gave me about the game, but nothing is so good as Tom Brown. Hi! didn't he go into it, though!" And Billy, in the exuberance of his joy, let fly one leg, forgetful of Seth, who was hovering too near just at that moment, intent upon Billy's words.

Away went Seth over backward, much to Billy's amazement and the enjoyment of the school.

"A touch-down, a touch-down!" shouted the boys, as Seth was picking himself up, and down they went upon the human ball, for so fat was Seth that he rolled like a pincushion.

"Easy, boys, easy!" shouted Anstey. "Let him up to breathe." And the boys desisted, helping Seth to his feet, who looked none the worse for the scrimmage.

"You'll make a first-class centre," said Anstey to Seth. And Seth felt ennobled from that moment, and almost showed the arrogance of his pride to the smaller boys.

"Who'll come up with me into the back pasture to look over the golf courses this afternoon?"



"I, I," shouted one and all, glad of a few extra hours with the man to whom they looked as their leader in all that is dear to a boy's heart.

They had been staking out the putting green and tees, each boy taking upon himself the making of a good one so soon as the ground was fit to work, and were over by the group of pines, when suddenly Jim cried out, "Look there, Mr. Anstey!" pointing at the same time to the corner near the wood-lot, where Jacob usually climbed the wall. The group was silent through sheer amazement. Over the wall leaped the three dogs, running as if for their lives. Anstey called to them, and whistled, but he might as well have commanded the wind. On they sped across the pasture homewards, and were out of sight in a few seconds. Before they could recover from their astonishment another figure was seen to leap the wall lightly. It was Nance!

She flew rather than ran. This was too much for man and boys. Without word of halloo, they raced down the slope and across the hollow to intercept her. In a moment she saw them, and turned to them. She met them breathless, nor could she speak for full a minute. She was trembling, too.

"What is it, Nancy?" said Anstey, gently. "What has frightened you so? We can protect you now."



The girl shook her head. All the color had left her face. She pointed to the woods. "Over there it was!" she stammered, her teeth chattering.

"What was, Nancy?"

"The thing."

"What was it like?" said Anstey, wondering what the girl could have seen to quench all the brave light in her eyes.

"Oh, I can't tell you — oh, do come home as quick as we can — it'll come after us — oh, do come, do!" She pulled at his arm, and the boys, a good deal upset by Nancy's evident terror, turned to Anstey for orders.

"You go down to Mr. Foss's with Nancy, Jim and Seth, and the rest of us will go up into the woods to investigate. Bring up the guns, Jim, when you come back."

But poor Nancy broke down into hysterical crying, and sobbed and clung so, first to Anstey, then to Jim and Seth, that they were nonplussed.

The boys, who hated to see a girl like Nancy cry, began to look uneasy.

Anstey took matters into his own hands. "We'll all go down to the house, and when Nancy feels better, she will tell us what she saw."

"Oh, come quick," sobbed Nancy. "It was — was crunching the lamb, and it was all bloody."

They asked no more questions then, but hurried down to the Roost.



Evidently the girl had had a terrible fright, and Martha Foss was startled to see her look as she did. When she was calmer, she went into Anstey's room, where he and the boys were waiting to hear her story.

"Uncle Reuben missed a sheep two or three days ago, and he has been trying to find it. He thought it had got out under one of the bars of the fold — he put them out there last week, the sun was so warm and the snow gone. This afternoon, I went over to Aunt Liscom's to carry her some embroidery silk she had asked me to buy in the village, and I found Uncle Reuben all upset because he hadn't found the sheep, and had just missed a lamb. I told him I would come over cross-lots and see if I could get any trace of it. Just as I came through the clump of spruce and hemlocks the other side of the woods, Siegfried and Freya and Fidget came bounding to meet me, and I knew you must be somewhere near. Just as we came into the clearing, all at once the dogs lay right down at my feet, whining and trembling. I didn't know what to make of it to see them act so. I looked down at them, and there in a little patch of snow were some huge tracks and some blood. Then I heard a tearing and crunching over in the spruces. I was dreadfully frightened, and only looked round once before I ran, but I saw just as plain as could



be a great yellow thing tearing up that little lamb. Oh, it made me sick! And when I started to run, the dogs ran, too, as if for dear life, and — and that's all!"

"Quite enough for one day's experience, Nancy. We'll have to look this matter up."

"By cracky!" cried Seth, excitedly, "I bet it's Tige! Two years ago, you remember, Mrs. Foss, he killed a sheep over the mountain, an' the deacon had ter pay twenty-five dollars to get clear. He said he'd answer fer him, an' he chains him up nights, but he's loose days. Did yer say he was yaller, Nance?"

"Yes, a tawny yellow."

"That's him," cried Seth. "There ain't no trustin' a mastiff if he gits the taste er blood — is there, Mr. Anstey?"

"No — you never can tell; all goes right for a time, then the first thing you know they end by chewing a man up. I had one once, that in a nasty fit killed a pet setter of mine, and I've never wanted to have anything to do with the breed since. I shouldn't wonder if you had solved the mystery, Seth — but, after all, it doesn't account for the dogs' fright. We'll look into the affair to-morrow. It's better for you to tell the deacon, Seth, and keep the dog chained till we find out. It's getting too late to do much now. I'll go home with you, Nancy."



The girl looked up with a grateful smile. "Let's go before dark, please."

"I'm ready when you are."

Miffins had not been with the boys in the back pasture; he had driven down to Barnet with Jacob for "feed." At supper Martha told Nancy's adventure, and John supplemented details.

"Sho!" said Jacob, "it ud turned *my* stomach ter see sech er sight, let alone a delicate gal's. Guess the deacon'll hev ter pay the fiddler this time — fer we ain't goin' ter stan' it. Ef the critter hez got the taste er blood, there ain't no tellin' what'll be the outcome. He's bigger'n er man, 'n' nobody wants ter feel him at his throat. He'll hev ter be shot — 'n' mighty quick too. The critter hez hed one full meal, but, in case he's sneakin' roun', I'll shut up the sheep ter-night under the barn, 'n' let 'em out ter-morrer mornin'."

The dogs had kept in the house ever since their return, nor could anything induce them to take their evening constitutional.

"Thet beats all," said Jacob.

"Good dogs know a thing or two sometimes that we don't," said Anstey, "so I won't force them out."

But neither would they go outside the woodshed the next morning. It puzzled Anstey.



"I'll tell you what, Mr. Foss, after school we'll ferret out this mystery; something's wrong somewhere."

"All right," said Jacob, as he drove Anstey and Miffins down to school, for the snow had gone and the roads were running water.

But school was not quite over when Jacob made his appearance with the jigger on wheels.

He was in a high state of excitement, as John saw when he drove up to the door.

"One er my best sheep's gone!" he cried, "'n' Barzy says one er his'n went last night. I'm er goin' down ter the village ter git ez many men ez hez shot-guns, or rifles, ter come up, 'n' track the durned critter 'n' kill him. I'll call fer yer on my way back." And off he drove, lashing the horses into a gallop.

The school was broken up in less time than it takes to tell. Jim Leonard and three of the oldest boys, who were good shots, ran home to ask permission to join the men. Seth had had no opportunity to tell Jacob that it wasn't the mastiff, for the dog had been with the deacon "over the mountain" all the afternoon. So the mystery remained unexplained.

Martha was watching anxiously at the door as the jigger loaded with men and boys came up the hill. Some were walking up, the muzzles of their guns to the earth. In all there were twenty-eight, including the three boys.



“Oh, do let me go,” pleaded Miffins of Jacob and Anstey. “I won’t be in the way. I’ll stay up by the pines while you all do the tramping, and I can signal if I see anything. You know I’m a good shot, now. Mr. Anstey, let me go just this once. I’ll never get another chance to see a real hunt!”

Jacob and Anstey looked at each other, and they hadn’t the heart to say “No,” although their judgment was against it.

“Wal, sonny, I like yer pluck, ’n’ ef Mr. Anstey says ‘yes,’ yer may go. Now, marm, yer can keep still; I know how yer feel — but this is stiff work, ’n’ women can’t hev their say allus.”

“Here, Miffins, take this whistle — it’s a policeman’s signal — you’ve heard them before. The sound will carry well, and you can signal if anything should turn up. I don’t like leaving you up there though,” he added, as if in doubt as to the wisdom of his decision.

“Oh, I’ll take care of myself. I’ll stay right by the pines. It’s only I want to see the sport.”

The men agreed to divide their number into squads of four each — that made seven in all — and close in from all sides, beating in the creature, whatever it might be, from all sides. They reckoned on a circle with a diameter of two miles, Reuben’s house, the Roost, and Barzy’s house, being the apexes of an inscribed triangle.



They separated, leaving Miffins at the group of pines. The dogs they left at home.

The patch of snow in which Nancy had seen the tracks had disappeared, and there was not a trace of the lamb but a tuft or two of wool caught on the spruces. No mark of any beast was there — the ground having dried well at that height — no lair — nothing to indicate the presence of any animal.

The men had appointed three o'clock as the time when they all were to start in toward Reuben's wood-lot, beating underbrush and woods as they gradually narrowed the circumference of the circle.

Miffins waited impatiently for the appearance of some one or something. The crows flew over by threes, flapping their heavy wings, and cawing loudly. A squirrel chattered in a branch above him. Otherwise there was not a sound. Once a hen-hawk circled majestically far up in the blue deeps.

Miffins was the proud possessor of a rifle, a present from Anstey. It was loaded now, and Miffins was leaning on the gun-stock, wishing something would happen, when his eye caught a bit of faded green just over the fence near the brakes where Nancy used to hide. He went to the five-barred gate and looked more closely. It was the girl's green and white checked gingham



sunbonnet that had lain bleaching and rotting under the winter snows. Miffins laughed to himself. He would rescue it and present it to Nancy, "in memoriam." So he thought as he lay flat and crept under the lower bar, dragging his gun and crutch after him.

But, before he could rise, a strange sound came to his ear — in fact, it seemed almost in his ear. A heavy breathing — then something like the exaggerated purring of a cat. It ceased, and Miffins, scarce breathing, lay low and listened. Soon there was a slight movement in the hemlock bush just beyond the mass of dead, snow-soaked brakes. Then again the deep purr. There was a thin place among the lower branches, and Miffins, raising himself on his elbows, could look through. The western sun shone into the nook which was open toward Reuben's wood-lot, and Miffins saw within fifteen feet of him a huge panther stretched at ease, like a contented cat, basking in the warmth of the sun.

That one look told Miffins what was before him. He had seen too many colored prints of the animal in Anstey's natural history books not to recognize it at the first glance.

The boy's heart beat somewhere in his throat and ears for a minute. He saw nothing — everything blurred before his eyes. When his vision cleared, his mind cleared, too. There was but



one thing to be done, — wait till he heard or saw the men coming from the woods, then fire at the beast, hoping he would spring from his lair at the shot, and so give the men warning of their danger and a chance to shoot in the clearing. The brute's belly was evidently full.

Noiselessly he drew his gun into position, still lying flat, not daring to move. He aimed and waited — how long he never knew; years it seemed to him.

Finally, just as the last beams of the sun were leaving the lair, Miffins heard a faint "hal-loo," answered by another. A moment, and he heard them calling from all quarters. They were coming. What if they shouldn't be looking! What if the rifle missed fire!

The panther, too, had heard the unwonted sounds and turned over, stretching his tawny limbs. Then he rose, alert — scenting danger at last.

Oh, if the men would only come in sight! Miffins raised the rifle, taking sure aim again between shoulder and rib. He dared not turn to see if the men were over, for the beast looked about to crouch for a spring — a shot rang out; — with a tremendous bound the panther cleared the underbrush and landed in the opening. The men, some of whom were over, some on the wall, and some on the edge of the woods, startled by



the shot, looked simultaneously in the direction of the sound, and saw the great creature leap into the open. It was the work of a few seconds. Scarcely had the creature landed on his feet, when shot after shot found its way to the spot. Some plowed the ground on either side of Miffins. One struck the lower bar of the gate, embedding itself there. For a few seconds, Miffins was as much under fire as the panther, who, maddened with his wounds, snarled and hissed and bounded forward in great leaps, but each time more feebly, until, after three hundred feet of misery, the head dropped, and the huge body rolled over, pierced in every vital organ.

A shout went up that was heard at Reuben's and the Roost by the anxious watchers.

Then in the second's silence that followed, a voice broke in, — Anstey's, — "Good God, the boy!" and the men's faces blanched with a great fear, and their strong limbs shook. Between twenty-eight bullets and a panther, could a boy live?

For a minute Anstey had no strength to move or call, and Jacob sat down shaking pitiably. But as Anstey started to run, the men cried out with a great cry, for over the fence beyond the pines something was waving — it was a dilapidated sunbonnet on the end of a gun. Again Anstey's strength gave out for a second — and the tears



of thankfulness rolled down Jacob's cheeks. As if impelled by one desire, the men and boys, forgetful of the great beast that lay motionless in the hollow, dashed across the pasture to the spot.

John reached him first.

"All right, Miffins?" he asked, anxiously.

"All right, sir," answered the boy, joyfully. The men and boys were around him in an instant.

"Tell us all about it," — and Miffins told of the long watch, his decision, and the signal-shot.

"If I only hit!" he exclaimed; "he bounded so quick I couldn't tell."

"You hit! you hit!" cried the boys. "There's blood all about where he landed."

The men improvised a stretcher of birch saplings and got the huge beast upon it. Miffins was placed on one end, and the triumphal procession amid excited talk and shouts of victory entered the yard of the Roost and deposited the carcass on the barn floor.

The boys ran down to announce the feat to the villagers, and until eight o'clock there was a stream of farm wagons filled with men, women, and children filing up the hill to view the panther on the barn floor. Seven feet, from nose to tip of tail, weight one hundred and eighty-two pounds, — a regular old aboriginal of the primeval forest of the Green Mountains.

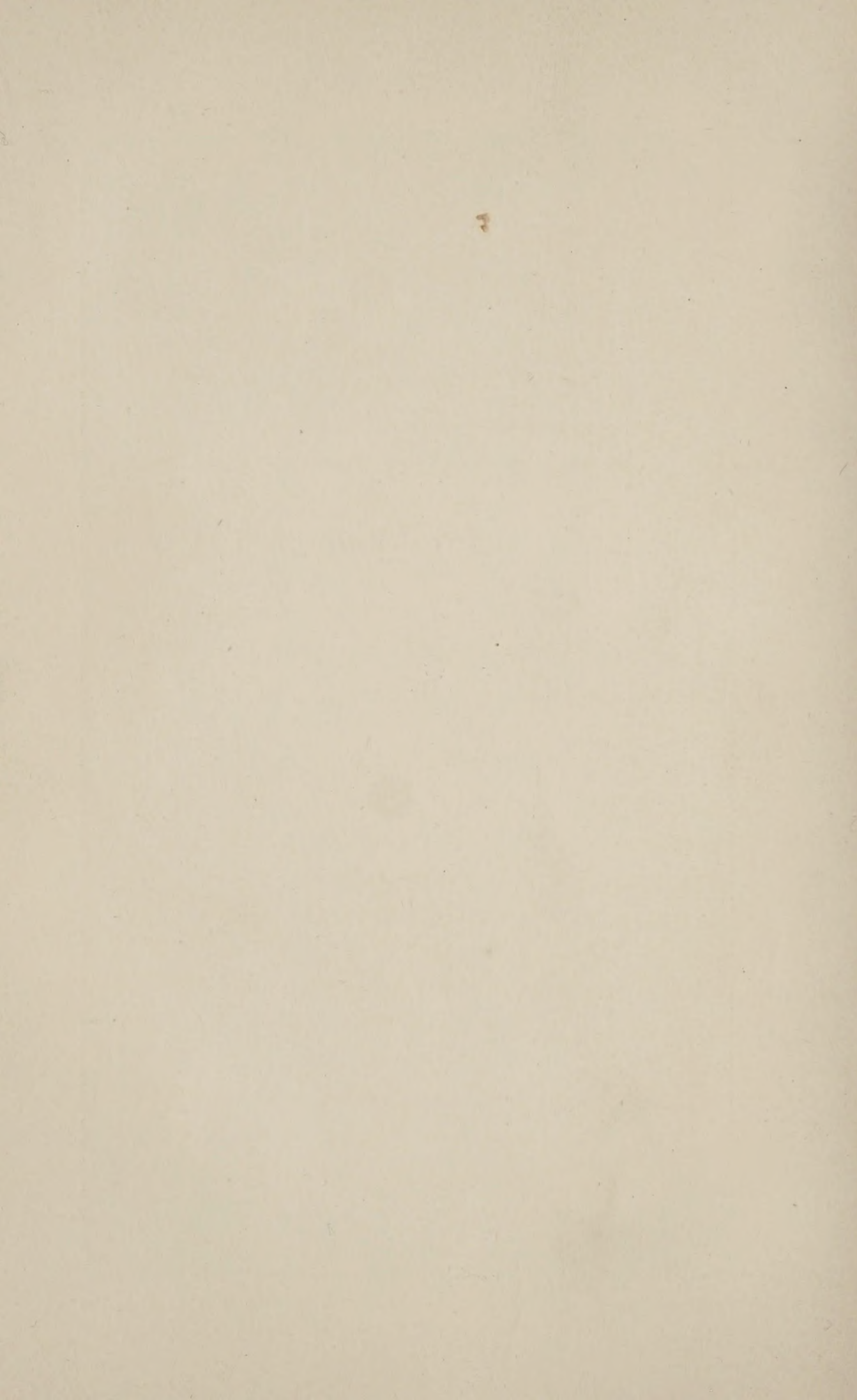
It has always remained a mystery whence he





*"AMID EXCITED TALK AND  
SHOUTS OF VICTORY."*







came. When the beast was skinned, it was found that Miffins's rifle-ball had pierced the jugular vein.

That night, as Miffins lay on the rug before the fire in Anstey's room, he felt happier than ever before in his life of fourteen years; for he had done a brave deed — an act of prowess, for all he was cripple and "half a boy."

"What about Sir Galahad's deeds, now, Miffins?" said Anstey, smiling down at the boy.

Miffins looked up gratefully. He knew John Anstey had read his thought, and he *felt* knighted.

Jacob put both hands on his shoulders when the boy went to bid him good-night, and looked long into his face.

"Yer give me a turn ter-day, sonny, I sha'n't git over fer one while — but I'm proud on ye — proud on ye; yer gittin' ter be a man," and he wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

Martha Foss stole into the bedroom after Miffins was in bed, and tucked the coverlet about him. Then she bent over to kiss him. "Mother's glad her boy is safe and sound to-night," she said, and Miffins knew he was "her boy" from that time forth.

The beautiful skin was stuffed, and the panther stands in the Capitol to-day as witness to the truth of a still-hunt among the peaceful Green Hills of Vermont.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *Summer Plans*

MR. ANSTEY senior and Burden, having had glowing accounts of the still-hunt, could endure it no longer. Without invitation, they put themselves aboard the north-bound train, and telegraphed from Windsor they were coming.

Jacob was at Hurdyville when the stage from Barnet came in, bringing the telegram and the two travellers.

“We’ll put up at the inn, Mr. Foss,” said Mr. Anstey, “and to-morrow we’ll be up bright and early to see that boy of mine. The rascal — panther hunts and sugaring-off, and every sort of entertainment that we city men can’t get! We’ve borne it about as long as we can. Now we’re going to see for ourselves!”

“Thet’s right, thet’s right,” laughed Jacob, “keep ’n eye on him, he ain’t too old yit. But yer ain’t er goin’ inter no tavern so long ez the Roost’s kitchen door stands wide open. Marthy’d



never git over it ef I listened ter any sech thing. Ther's room 'n' ter spare. Git right in here with me, 'n' we'll be ter home by eight. Yer set erlong er me, sir, 'n' Mr. Burden can set back with Miffins. Hud up, Eth!"

"How's my boy?" was the father's first earnest inquiry, as they drove off.

Now Jacob had never been told the true reason for John's coming, so he answered the father accordingly.

"Tough ez 'n ox — hale 'n' hearty; he can fell more trees 'n' chop more wood 'n any man of his years round here."

The father's heart rejoiced.

"I've wanted to come up many a time these last two months. I've been hungry for a sight of him. But every time I wrote John would send word, 'Not yet, father, wait till spring.' He knows my gouty trouble, and insisted the cold was too severe, — thirty-five below, he tells us, at times."

"Yes, it's hung 'round the cipher 'bout all Janooary 'n' Feb'ry. Guess 'twuz jest ez well yer didn't come then. He's er great han' fer air. Sleeps with all his winders open when it's fifteen below. Beats all, though, how he thrives on't."

Burden and Miffins were deep in football mysteries as they drove into the yard.

"Aren't you a little late, Mr. Foss?" called



John from the porch. "Why, father! Halloo, old fellow" (to Burden), and he was wringing his father's hand with both his, while Burden was thumping him on the back in his delight at seeing him again. "All well with mother?" he said, anxiously.

"All well, my boy," replied his father, with suspicious moisture in his eyes. "But when a young fellow sneaks out of New York in November, and expresses no particular desire to see his beloved parents as month after month passes — it's time to get suspicious; so I've come up to see what is the attraction, and brought Burden as a witness."

"Any pretty girls in the immediate neighborhood, Johnny?" said Burden.

John laughed. "Find out for yourself, Burden. Come in now and meet Mrs. Foss."

Martha was equal to the occasion, although wild visions of the chaotic state of her one "spare chamber" disturbed her wonted serenity just a little. But Anstey settled it all for her.

"Mr. Burden will turn in with me, Mrs. Foss; my cot has been waiting for this; we'll put father into Miffins's room, — it is fine and warm for his gout, — and we'll bundle Miffins into the spare bed up-stairs."

"I never see sech a man," said Martha, to John's father.



"His mother and I think there are few such," he replied, quietly, his eyes beaming upon his son, who was playing host most delightfully.

"Where's your den, John?"

"In here; come along, Burden, till supper's ready."

When the two men saw the room, they sat down solidly and declared they would not leave it.

"I'll not stir from this place till Mrs. Foss provides just such another for me, Anstey. You always had the luck in college, and it's followed you up."

The dogs were wild with joy over Mr. Anstey senior; the fire crackled merrily in the fireplace, and the three men all talked at once in their delight at being together again. Martha's ample supper was topped off with pancakes, the thickness of a knife-blade and the lightness of down, swimming in the noted "first run" of the delicious maple-syrup. Burden ate them as if on a wager.

"I can't stop, Mrs. Foss!" he exclaimed. "If you can only keep right on!" And Martha got into such a gale of laughter when John began to keep tally of his friend's gastronomic prowess, that she failed to "flip" the pancakes properly, and two or three landed on the floor.

"Two dozen and three!" cried Anstey. "Call



time, do, father, or there'll be trouble. I'll punch him if he eats another — and, two dozen and four! For heaven's sake, let up, Burden!"

And Burden let up, not for want of appetite, but for lack of capacity.

The three talked into the small hours of the night, and Anstey laid his plans before his father and Burden for approval.

"I've been wishing, father, we might all be together up here for a few months and live a simpler life than that to which we are accustomed. I don't know how mother'll take to it —"

His father interrupted him:

"Your mother will take it just as you take it, John, and I don't deny I'm beginning to look forward to it myself." He drew a long breath. "A man slips off the shackles of a city-bound life up here, and in association with such lovable, unspoiled people as that couple in the other room."

"I'm glad you look at it that way, father. The winter has done me no end of good, and now I want some of you to share the pleasure with me."

"I'll answer for your mother, John. What do you say, Burden?"

"I'm only waiting for the chance to come, sir. John proposes to enlarge the sugar-house a little and make it a bit more permanent, and I know May will be pleased enough to get an invitation to these high latitudes."



“Well, if May would come, your mother would be contented enough, John.”

Burden's pretty sister had occupied a good many of John's thoughts, before the doctor's decision. He looked up frankly now.

“If May could come, Burden, I should feel all right about mother.”

“She'll jump at the chance,” replied Burden, and it was well for that young man that his dignified sister did not hear him give her away in that fashion.

John smiled to himself. “She's fond of riding?” he said.

“You know that as well as I do, old man,” was the blunt brother's response. “Can we get good saddle-horses up here?”

“It's a Morgan county,” replied John. “Mr. Foss has three stunners in the paddock. He's going to put them up in the back pasture tomorrow — the scene of our famous hunt; we'll look them over in the morning and take in the sugar-house and views on the way. The trouble is they're unbroken. I don't know as they've had a halter on; box-stalls, you know, even in this region.”

Burden looked thoughtful. “I've an idea, Johnny —”

“Out with it, then; you're dangerous if you ever keep one to yourself.”



"Stop your chaff and listen to me. I've an idea that if Mrs. Anstey and May come up, the Barnards will want to come too."

"Ho, ho!" laughed John. "Sits the wind in that quarter?"

"Not 'sitting,' Johnny, but shifting, merely shifting. Now, where can we stow them all?"

Anstey and his father laughed at that "we;" they saw that Burden had already preëmpted Beaver Tail for the season.

"Possibly Mrs. Liscom, just over the summit of the mountain, our nearest neighbor, might be induced to take them. Mr. Liscom is much better this spring, and they have a fine old house up there — and no children."

"The very thing!" said Burden, and for the next hour he planned what he called the "summer campaign."

Early on the morrow, Jacob and Miffins took the colts — Bob and Nap and Bet — up into the back pasture.

"Nap seems ter hev got his sperits back agin," remarked Jacob, as Nap reared, curvetted, pranced, and pawed. Miffins was tempted to confess, but thought better to let bygones be bygones.

"Nary one on 'em's well broke yit, 'n' I ain't so young ez I wuz," said Jacob, rather dubiously, as Nap showed his heels to the blue sky.



"Mr. Anstey's a good horseman — he's ridden a bronco time and again, and a mustang, too; p'raps he'll break one of 'em and Mr. Burden another."

"I dunno, — I dunno," replied Jacob, doubtfully. "Them city chaps hez sech confounded notions 'bout hosses, thet I'm feared my colts'll resent 'em. They ain't broncos 'n' they ain't mustangs; they're jest clever Morgan critters thet ain't no knowledge of spur 'n' whip, 'n' they won't stan' it."

Burden and Anstey were off directly after breakfast for a long walk. They took in the sugar-house and the colts on their way over to Reuben Liscom's.

"By George, John, I've never seen the equal of that colt!" exclaimed Burden, as Nap flew across the hollow to greet them, and nosed his pockets; then, finding nothing, showed his heels, and literally waltzed away toward the wood-lot.

"Do you think they could be broken for either of the girls to ride by the last of June?"

"We can't risk anything with them," replied John. "They're as gentle as kittens in the stall, but one can never tell what a colt will be under petticoats. We might try what we can do with them this afternoon."

"I'm with you there, John; my fingers twitch to feel the bridle with one of those beauties."



They were praising the colts at dinner, and discussing the chances of breaking them easily to the saddle. Jacob listened delightedly — for praise of his colts was praise of him.

When the meal was finished, Miffins beckoned to Anstey. John followed him into the woodshed.

“I don’t believe Nance would care if I told now, Mr. Anstey, but those colts are broken, and *she* did it.”

“I don’t understand, Miffins; a girl couldn’t break those creatures; why, even Mr. Burden and I look for a tussle, for all they are so gentle.”

“But she has, though,” persisted Miffins. “And if I can get her up into the back pasture this afternoon, I’ll prove it to you.”

“How?” said John.

“You’ll see,” said Miffins, significantly.

“Wouldn’t she mind our being there?” asked Anstey.

“She needn’t know it; besides, if she did, she wouldn’t mind. She knows she’s the best horse-woman in this county.”

“I’d like to see her!” exclaimed Anstey, “but I’m afraid — well, if she gets too daring, we’ll be there to see that no harm comes to her.”

“Let me fix it, will you?” said Miffins, eagerly.

“All right, I can trust you.”

“Then come up this afternoon, sir, you and



Mr. Burden, about three, and hide behind the hemlocks near the lair."

Miffins asked for the loan of Ethan and the light farm wagon. He had heard Nance say the day before in school, she was going by way of the road to her Aunt Liscom's that afternoon, and he counted upon finding her on the way. Nor did he miscalculate.

"Nance!" he shouted, to the blue-hooded figure walking so rapidly up the hill.

Nancy turned and came toward him.

"Why, where did you come from?"

"From home — here, get in; I'll take you up to your uncle's."

"Oh, but that's good of you, Miffins. We heard last night you had company. Tell me about them," she said, as she sprang in.

Miffins was only too glad to have so interested a listener. He told of Mr. Burden's appreciation of everything on Beaver Tail, the people, the Roost, the pancakes; last he spoke of the colts and their prospective breaking in.

Nancy laughed merrily. "They don't know how well they're broken, do they? I think we could astonish them, don't you, Miffins?"

"*You* could," said Miffins. "I say, Nance," he exclaimed, as if a sudden thought had struck him. "Let's hitch Ethan and see if the colts remember their training. I'd give a good deal to see you ride again."



"Just what I was longing to do," cried Nancy, gaily. "I have not been on a horse this winter. Have you got anything with you?"

"Yes, some maple-sugar and a halter."

"That'll do. Perhaps they are a little wild," she added, "and will need sweetening."

"Here, where are you going?" she cried, as Miffins prepared to tie up Ethan near the wood-lot. "Drive over to the pines, so you won't have to walk."

"No, I'm going to hitch here," said the boy, decidedly, and Nancy, wondering, said nothing.

Soon Anstey and Burden, hidden behind the hemlocks, heard the clear, sweet voice singing:

"Come, Nap, Nap, Nap, Napoleon,  
Come get your white potato;  
Come, Nap, Nap, Nap, Napoleon,  
Come quick whene'er I say so."

Nap, picking about near the pines, lifted his beautiful head and pricked his ears. Then, with a snort and prolonged gentle whinny, he trotted to meet her.

"I can't stand this hood, it's too warm," said Nance, throwing back the blue flannel head-covering, "and I shall melt in this jacket, exercising so." Off flew the jacket.

Burden and Anstey watched every one of her graceful movements.



“What is she up to, Anstey?” said Burden, anxiously. “She isn’t going to mount that colt, is she? I say, we mustn’t let her,” he whispered, excitedly; “it’s criminal. I’m going to holler.”

“Keep still!” said John, peremptorily, clapping his hand over Burden’s mouth. “I’ll risk her with Miffins.”

Nancy caressed Nap’s nose, evidently to his satisfaction; then she fed him, and slipped on the halter, which he resented at first, but in a moment submitted to with good grace. Holding by his mane, she ran along by his side, and with a leap was on his back. The colt reared and plunged till Burden turned white, and Anstey cursed himself for yielding to Miffins.

“She’ll be thrown,” groaned Burden.

“No, she won’t — see how she sticks!” cried Anstey. And sure enough, Nancy was holding her own, and in a moment the two, horse and rider, were cantering round and round the hollow in true circus trim. A pile of birch saplings, perhaps four feet in height, had been left by Jacob in the centre of the hollow. The men had used a part of them to make the stretcher for the panther. Toward them Nancy guided the colt, and backward and forward, over and over, she put the graceful, spirited animal through his paces.

Miffins threw up his cap and hurrahed, and it



was all John could do to restrain Burden from imitating his example. His enthusiasm knew no bounds.

“By George, what a beauty! You rascal, — never to let on; I never saw such grace except in a circus-rider. Look at her hair and her coloring” (the freckles had faded away during the winter), “and her voice like a lark. See her now!”

Nap was waltzing slowly across the hollow and up the slope to the wood-lot, when, suddenly, with a bound, Nancy was off and was at his side. Seizing him by the mane, she took his soft nose between her hands, and planted a kiss on the white stripe. Then, with a gentle slap, she started him into a trot toward the other side of the pasture.

“How’s that?” she called to Miffins.

“Oh, Nance, it’s bully.”

The two climbed into the wagon and drove off down the wood road and round the highroad to Reuben Liscom’s.

Not until six years afterward, did Nancy know that she had had for witnesses of her wonderful equestrian powers two of the best riders in the State of New York.

The visit was prolonged over Sunday; then, with plans laid for a happy, and as they hoped, profitable summer, Mr. Anstey and Burden bade good-by to the old Roost and its inmates.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### *The Husking*

WHAT a summer that was! The spring term closed in early June, and before the last of the month, Mrs. Anstey and May Burden were installed in the Roost, and Mrs. Barnard and her daughter, Edith, at Mrs. Liscom's.

It had been somewhat difficult to persuade Mrs. Reuben to take boarders. But Anstey smoothed away all difficulties, and Nancy promised to be her "right-hand man" in everything. Seth's sister had come over as "help," and the roomy old house blossomed like a rose under Mrs. Liscom's careful housewifery and Nancy's taste.

Mrs. Barnard declared the simplicity was refreshing, and Edith Barnard adapted herself to the new surroundings in a really wonderful way.

Anstey and Burden occupied the sugar-house, which they had transformed into a fine camp. They breakfasted by themselves, but the other two meals they took at the Roost.



Martha had moved the kitchen stove out into the wood-shed, and during the long summer days the old house was cool and refreshing. She had a good woman — a cousin of Jacob's — to help her, for neither Anstey nor his mother would hear of her overtaxing herself by attempting the work alone.

Miffins was as good as a kitchen-maid. He picked and washed the vegetables, shelled peas, set the table, scoured the knives, and drove on errands to the village.

How the days flew by! Burden groaned over it, but managed to fill them full. For there was golf and tennis, bathing in the Pool, riding over hill and dale, berrying in the back pasture, and running back and forth from the camp to Reuben Liscom's or the Roost. Two of their friends came up for September, and with them a niece of Mrs. Barnard's, and the young people turned children again, and led a free, unconventional out-of-door life all through that glorious month. And Nance enjoyed it all, with never a heart-burn. She had her work, which she accomplished to her aunt's complete satisfaction, and many an excuse did Burden make to be at the Liscoms' about the time that Nancy was setting the table in the broad front hall. His eyes rested with pleasure on the graceful, girlish figure, gowned in white and amply aproned in blue and white checked ging-



ham, as it flitted in and out of the hall door, bringing cream and biscuit and berries, filling a bowl with late June roses for a centre-piece, or wreathing, in September, the supper-table with clematis.

He had included her in many of the riding-parties, and the girl's delight was refreshing to all those partly spoiled children of the rich, and her exquisite seat a matter of general comment.

Anstey took note of his two pupils, and grew prouder and prouder of them. He saw that Nancy was blossoming into a beautiful girlhood — sixteen the twenty-eighth of September — under the loving, womanly influence of his mother and Martha Foss, and Miffins shedding the rough externals in refining companionship, and developing the manliest qualities with the example of Jacob Foss's honest labor daily before him.

They were all in the camp one evening late in September, a week before they left for the city — Jacob and Martha, John and his father and mother, the Barnards, Burden and his sister, Nance and Miffins, Edith's cousins, and the two friends. A camp-fire lighted the happy faces, and story-telling was in order; then singing. Burden's friend played the banjo and they all sang well.

It was Jacob's party, and he beat time with his feet and twirled his thumbs contentedly.



"I'm er goin' ter hev it out ter-night, marm," he exclaimed, as Martha protested against his continual cry for more songs. "I've got ter work like er Turk the next three days, er gittin' in the corn ready fer huskin', 'n' I'm goin' ter play a leetle extra overtime ter-night."

"That's right, Mr. Foss," cried Burden. "Have the fun while you can, and when you can't, we'll turn in and help get in the corn."

"Much obleeged; mebbe I'll take yer at yer word," said Jacob.

"Do you ever have an old-fashioned husking now-a-days, Mr. Foss?" asked Mrs. Anstey.

"Wal, I hain't, coz I hain't hed no young folks ter carry it out. Gray-heads can't do it alone, yer know." Jacob smiled knowingly.

"Oh, Mr. Foss!" cried Edith Barnard, "can't we have an old-fashioned husking to end our summer with? You have plenty of young people now, I'm sure."

"Ter be sure we can," replied Jacob, entering into the project with heart and soul, "dancin' 'n' fiddle 'n' all. We'll get Barzy over ter help."

Martha laughed brightly. "To think of them young folks dancin' on our old barn floor!"

"It will be a treat, Mrs. Foss," Mrs. Barnard assured her. "We'll all help you prepare for it, as far as we know how."

The young men were as eager as the girls.



"Better engage yer partners now," laughed Jacob.

"Suppose we invite my school," said Anstey.

"The very thing," said Burden. "I was thinking the girls would be as scarce as blueberries."

"Now, I give you all fair warning," he continued. "It's going to be an *old-fashioned* husking — no playing at it, and you needn't try to save your hands, May, and wear gloves, for it won't be tolerated."

"Who said I was going to?" laughed May. "You take too much for granted with your sister."

"But you don't any of you grasp my meaning," said Burden, laughing. "I said old-fashioned, Mr. Foss; and they don't take."

"Yes, they do, but they're a leetle shy. But you needn't go ter raisin' yer hopes, coz a red ear is erbout ez scurce ez a white blackbird."

What fun they had preparing for that husking-party! True to their word, the four young men "turned in" and helped Jacob get in the corn. He confided to Martha afterward, "they were worth a dozen er them shif'less fellers ez hires out; they've got brawn, too, marm," he added with respect.

Numerous pumpkins were cut into faces and lighted by candles within. These were hung



from the trees in the yard. Flaming branches of maple, sheaves of yellow wheat, pumpkins, and crook-necked squashes decked the interior of the great barn all around the scaffolding. Dozens of farm safety-lanterns were borrowed for the occasion, and strung on ropes wound with ground hemlock that stretched from beam to beam. The great doors were opened, and the inside panels draperied with brilliant masses of Virginia creeper.

The barn was seventy feet long, and gave ample room for the rough spruce table which the men put together in such a way that they could easily knock it apart when dancing was in order.

It was covered with snow-white table-cloths, and the girls bordered it with a band of the rich red and yellow maple leaves. In the centre and at each end was a round of wood, the butts, sawed evenly, of some noble spruces. These were covered with the last of the late ferns, and heaped with early rosy-cheeked harvest apples, russet pears, and Concord grapes, all the products of Jacob's and Reuben's farms. Mrs. Liscom and Martha contributed some architectural frosted chocolate layer-cakes of the size of milk-pans, and the Christmas work-baskets were again in requisition, but filled this time with ham sandwiches.



Nancy had learned the art of making pump-kin pies from her Aunt Liscom, and contributed two dozen golden ones, cut into quarters. Burden hung over them in an ecstasy of anticipation, as she placed them at regular intervals down the long table.

Mrs. Anstey and Mrs. Barnard had laid their heads together, and sent for huge bonbon-boxes imitating ears of corn and filled with Huyler's best butter-taffies. These were strung together and hung in bunches from the lantern ropes just over the table.

Anstey had written the invitations to all the school and invited them to appear in the costume of any Dickens character they particularly admired. The Dickens Club constituted themselves committee, and a fine collection of Dickensiana was the result.

The home party entered into the whole affair with great spirit, and worked late at night over their costumes.

Jacob and Martha and Mr. and Mrs. Liscom were not allowed to see anything of the final preparations. But they were escorted by Anstey and Burden and their friends to the barn when all were assembled.

What a sight met Jacob's eyes!

It was a perfect September night — the moon just rising at its full, the barn brilliant with lights and colors and vari-colored costumes.



All four were escorted to wooden armchairs trimmed with greens, and set on a raised platform at the farther end of the barn, through the long double line of merry-makers, who sang the lovely words of Whittier's "Husking" to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne."

"Heap high the farmer's wintry hoard,  
Heap high the golden corn;  
No richer gift has Autumn poured,  
From out her lavish horn."

How the fresh voices rang out, and how the eager hands caught up the ears of corn piled behind them, and waved them triumphantly, as Jacob and Martha, dazed and touched to their very hearts' core by such homage to their homely living, were placed on their rustic thrones.

"Wal, Marthy," said Jacob, when he found his voice, "it's wuth livin' 'n honest lifetime alone on Beaver Tail ter 'sperience *this*."

Martha was too overcome to do more than press his hand. Reuben coughed violently to hide his emotion, and Mrs. Liscom confided to Martha she was "tremblin' like a leaf." But all this passed off as the merry party introduced themselves.

There was Nance, the loveliest Dolly Varden in the world, and Edith Barnard as Lizzie Hexam, and May Burden as the Doll's Dressmaker, with her wonderful golden hair falling to her waist.



Burden was capital as Dick Swiveller, and Anstey as Traddles. Dot was a round bunch of a girl in the first-year Latin class, and Seth's sister was Mrs. Gummidge. Jim and Harry and Billy were bravely gotten up as Silas Wegg, Oliver Twist, and Parson Stiggins. Seth was determined to appear as Uriah Heep, and the committee allowed him to have his way, although they begged him to be Mr. Dick.

Sam Weller and Peggotty were there in the persons of Burden's friends, and Edith's cousin was Betsey Trotwood. And there, too, were the Marchioness and little Miss Flite, and Marley's Ghost, and Winkle, the sentimental, and Quilp and Mrs. Quilp, and last, but not least, Miffins as Tiny Tim.

"It's all I could be, you know," he said, quietly, to Anstey, and the man turned away abruptly, and this time the lump was in *his* throat.

First the quaintly costumed boys and girls set themselves to the husking. The fingers flew. Jacob descended from his chair of state.

"I can't stan' it," he cried. "I've got ter lend er hand or bust." And he busied himself with removing the husks in a bushel basket as fast as they collected in the four corners of the barn, and emptying them outside, while Barzy hauled in shock after shock to keep all hands busy. Only two red ears were found during the work. But



one, by luck, fell to Burden, who promptly claimed his kiss from the Marchioness amid shrieks of laughter, and one fell to Seth, who sidled up to Nancy, and nothing abashed, proceeded to claim his own, but found to his amazement he had kissed only the back of her hand, which she substituted for her cheek.

And when the bushels upon bushels of yellow ears had been turned into stalls and bins, filling them to overflowing, the supper was served by all the home party and good cheer abounded.

Burden declared afterward he had eaten six sandwiches, one whole pumpkin-pie, three pieces of chocolate cake, two apples, and drunk three mugs of Martha's delicious coffee.

Many hands made light work, and the table was soon cleared and taken down. Barzy scraped his fiddle, and there was a great hurry and scurry for partners. Jacob was in his element.

"Come, Marthy, you've got ter dance ter-night!" he cried, enthusiastically.

"Of course, but not with her husband," said John's father. "I claim that honor." And with old-time gallantry he offered his arm to Martha, who accepted it with visible pride.

"Wal, I be cut out fer onct," said Jacob, "but may I hev the honor, ma'am?" He jerked a bow to Mrs. Anstey, and pulled his forelock as if he had been forty years younger, and the sweet-



faced gentlewoman gave him her hand with inimitable grace, and took her place with him at the foot.

The barn rang with laughter. Such a clapping of hands, such a marking of time on the old barn floor. The swallows flew affrighted from their nests under the eaves. Reel in — reel out — Peggotty and Miss Flite, Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness, Uriah and Dolly Varden — Nancy was determined to make one boy's heart happy that night, — Betsey Trotwood in stiff cap and spectacles with Parson Stiggins, the Doll's Dress-maker and Oliver Twist, Silas Wegg (laying aside his stump) and Mrs. Quilp, and all the others, stamping, shouting, laughing, till they were almost incapacitated for dancing.

"My breath's gi'n out," panted Martha to her cavalier partner after the first winding of the reel.

"And my gout will be warning me soon, Mrs. Foss. Suppose we withdraw gracefully?" To which proposition Martha assented only too willingly, and was led back to her seat on the dais.

But Jacob and Mrs. Anstey danced it through. The graceful woman held her own with all the young girls, who admired her immensely. Not until the last long-drawn scrape of the fiddle made itself heard, and "curtsey to your partner"



was in order, did Jacob stop to wipe his brow, and with an extra flourish of his long arms bow to his partner and lead her to a seat.

Then the city young people gave the others a surprise. Burden led out Edith, one of Burden's two friends took Mrs. Barnard's niece, the other May, and Anstey led out Nance (Nance had been coached during the last four days). Jim played the banjo, and a minuet was danced, to the delight of all present.

Never before had Dick Swiveller and Lizzie Hexam, Sam Weller and Betsey Trotwood, Peggotty and the Doll's Dressmaker, Traddles and Dolly Varden danced a stately minuet in an old barn on one of the green hills of Vermont.

They were obliged to repeat it. Then Lizzie Hexam and the Doll's Dressmaker danced a cachucha with castanets that Burden had improvised out of small sheep-bells. Afterward, the four college men, to banjo accompaniment, sang their glees, and the whole school and Mr. Anstey as well, joined their "Vive l'amour," and it was twelve o'clock when the old refrain, "Good-night, ladies," acted as a hint that all pleasant things must have an end, huskings among them.

"What makes you so uneasy, Jacob?" said Martha to her spouse, as he turned over for the fifth time, about two in the morning.

"I vum, marm, I can't sleep with all thet music



'n' dancin' 'n' lights 'n' color er runnin' in my head. I feel kinder upset. 'Tain't the kind er life, arter all, marm, thet we country folks can stan' in the long run. Them city folks, gals 'n' all, must be tough somewhere."

"I know they be," said Martha, "fer Miss Burden danced till two 'n' three in the mornin' 'thout a thing over her shoulders, in a thin silk dress — dead er winter, too."

"Yer don't say so," Jacob yawned. "Wal, they're er goin' ter-morrer, 'n' much ez I like 'em, I'll be kinder glad ter settle down inter my old tracks, 'n' I don't think Mr. Anstey'll hev anythin' agin it. Jerusalem! how them girls did dance thet new-fangled dance!" Jacob's foot beat time on the foot-board.

"Go ter sleep, Jacob, an' don't be a fool at your time er life," warned Martha, a little severely, and under this unwonted extinguisher Jacob stopped beating time and went to sleep.



## CHAPTER XX.

### *A November Night*

“SEEMS kinder lonesome, marm,” said Jacob, as he brought in the milk one morning late in October.

“I miss ’em dretfully,” replied Martha.

Miffins came in at that moment with a basket of eggs. Jacob counted them. “It beats all how them hens strike jest ez soon ez prices git er leetle higher.”

“Nancy told me yesterday she had saved all her egg money this last year, and it amounted to thirty-seven dollars. She says she is going away to boarding-school in a few days, and if she hadn’t had the egg money she couldn’t have had any new things to go away with.”

“Nance going away!” cried Martha. “Well, I’m glad of it for the girl’s sake, but I shall miss her dretfully. How’d she come to go?”

“She said she was coming over to tell you all about it. I think Mrs. Barnard had something to do with it.”



"Like enough," said Martha, thoughtfully. Just then Anstey came in.

"Mr. Foss, can you get on without me for a few days?"

"You goin' too!" exclaimed Martha. And, "What yer goin' ter leave us fer?" asked Jacob, in the same breath.

"I've just been down for the mail, and in a letter from my mother, she says the doctor, after hearing such a good report" (Mrs. Anstey had confided her burden — mother-like — to Martha Foss), "wants to prove it by thumping me a bit. She writes, too, that Nancy Liscomb is coming down to the Barnards for a few days before she goes away to school, and they want me to bring her down in my care. So I can kill two birds with one stone if I go next Friday, and the committee let me off till Wednesday; that's the second of November."

"I'm glad 'tain't any longer than thet," said Jacob. "The Roost'll seem 'bout deserted 'thout yer."

"I couldn't leave the Roost long, Mr. Foss. I've struck root too deep in all this new life."

Jacob grasped the young man's hand, and wrung it, as the only expression of his appreciation.

"Barzy brought word this morning thet Silas Foss was ailin', 'n' his wife had been sick with



the grip," remarked Martha, irrelevantly, "'n' it seems ter fit in jest right."

"What air yer drivin' at, marm?" said Jacob. Anstey had gone into his room.

"Why, I've been thinkin' fer more'n a year past thet we owed them a visit; he's 'bout all the relation on your father's side you've got — only it's a great undertakin'; there ain't no denyin' that. I thought we could go over 'n' spend a few days with 'em while Mr. Anstey was in New York, 'n' cheer 'em up a little. It'll give Maranthy a rest. I b'lieve in visitin' when you can carry somethin' to folks 'n' not take everything away."

"'Twould be a good plan, marm. I hain't seen Silas fer er year. But how 'bout the boy?"

"I can take care of myself and the Roost, too," said Miffins. "You say yourself I can do the chores as well as a man."

"So yer can, sonny, so yer can, 'n' marm could leave 'nuff vittles fer yer."

"I'd like ter go over by stage, father," said Martha.

"You'll go jest which way you want ter. I, fer one, am glad 'nuff not ter take the hosses over that road, 'n' besides, I shall find 'nuff ter do fer Silas; mebbe he'll want his wood drawed, 'n' like 'nuff split."

"I'd like to stop a part of a day 'n' visit with Alviry Bird," said Martha.



“Wal, what’s ter hender? I’ll tell yer what we’ll do; we’ll go over by stage, ’n’ sonny can drive us down to Hurdyville, and when we come back Tuesday, we’ll take the stage ez fer ez Handy’s tavern, jest the other side er the mountin, ’n’ yer can visit with Alviry over dinner, ’n’ sonny can meet us there with the team ’bout four. We’ll git home by dark.”

“Thet’ll jest suit me,” said Martha, contentedly.

“Can I drive Nap?” Miffins asked, eagerly.

“Yer a good driver, sonny, ’n’ thet colt is ez stiddy after the summer’s work ez a wood-saw. He plowed er piece of sidlin’ land t’other day better’n Eth can do it. He’s surer-footed, too, ’n’ Ethan on sech a rough road.”

Miffins threw up his cap in his glee at the honor conferred on him.

Friday morning Miffins drove Martha and Jacob and Anstey to Hurdyville, and afterward carried Anstey down to Barnet for the 10.30 train.

“Ef it’s a-rainin’ yer needn’t come fer us, sonny,” were Jacob’s parting words. “But ef it *looks* like it, yer might. A heavy rain this time of year makes hard travellin’, ’n’ strains er wagon more’n er spill any time. Now yer’ve got yer orders, hev ye, all straight?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Miffins, repeating, “If it’s



raining, I'm not to come for you ; if it *looks* like rain, I'm to be there about four."

"Thet's right; now take care er yerself till I git back. Don't fergit ter wet thet feed 'n' — " Jacob's head was out of the stage, but Martha pulled him in.

It had been arranged that Jim Leonard should keep Miffins company during Martha's absence, and, to the boy's delight, Anstey had placed his rooms at their disposal while he was away. Jim remained till Tuesday morning. The two boys revelled in possession of the den and its contents, examining guns and pipes, books and pictures to their hearts' content. Martha had provided amply for their material wants, and the time passed only too quickly. But during the first three days it had rained almost without ceasing, keeping the boys in close confinement.

Lying on the rug with the dogs in front of the fire, they talked over their prospective Latin examination, their victory over the Montpelier football team, and laid wagers as to which girl would be the belle of the school now Nancy was away.

"I say," said Jim, on the last evening, waxing confidential, "don't you think it was awful fresh of Seth to try to kiss Nance that night of the husking?"

"It was just ignorance," said Miffins, decid-



edly, "downright ignorance. As if Nance would look at *him*."

"If I'd found a red ear I wouldn't had the cheek to even ask her, no matter how much I wanted to."

"Did you ever mind Mr. Anstey with the young ladies, Jim?" asked Miffins.

"I haven't seen as much of him with them as you have; so I don't know what you mean."

"I don't know as I mean anything in particular — but — well, you know he's awfully polite and jolly and all that with 'em — but there isn't a drop of spooniness about him. I'd bet he wouldn't kiss a girl even if she was willing, unless he had a right to — I mean, unless 'twas the real thing, you know." Miffins was growing confused.

"Oh, that's all rot," said Jim. "If a girl's *willing* you should kiss her, it's all fair enough, and a fellow'd be a prig not to."

"How about Nance?"

"Oh, well," said Jim, weakening a little, "that's different. Nance is the uncommon kind; you can't judge by her. I mean every-day kind of girls."

"Well, that's the kind I shouldn't want to — to —" said Miffins, avoiding with a sort of shyness the osculatory word. "Who's your favorite knight, Jim?"



"Sir Launcelot," replied Jim, promptly.  
"Who's yours?"

"I never told before," said Miffins, under his breath, "but it's Sir Galahad."

Jim stared at him. "Oh, well, if you're going to pattern after him, you won't have much to do with kissing. Where's that book on football rules?"

"Here 'tis," said Miffins, glad to change the subject.

"I wish you could go with me to-morrow to Handy's tavern, Jim, and shoot with me."

"I'd give anything if I could; I've always wanted to shoot in the woods north of the lake, but I promised father I'd be at home by ten Tuesday to help him; besides I'm afraid Mr. Foss wouldn't like such a load for Nap."

"No, I don't suppose he would. We've had such luck in the weather, regular water-spouts; I'm glad it's held up to-night; p'raps we'll have it fair to-morrow."

But the morrow brought no fair weather. Heavy clouds, apparently ready to drop water at any moment, rolled up from the south, and a chill wind carried them in huddling masses toward the north.

The East Branch at Hurdyville was level with its banks when the rain ceased on Monday night, and had not fallen on Tuesday morning, a sure



sign of rain still falling to the east. But of this Miffins in the Roost could know nothing.

He obeyed orders to the letter. It was not raining, and it did look like rain — with little prospect of it, however, after a three days' deluge.

Moreover, the wind, if it continued to blow, would by night dry the roads on the mountain, which drained easily the first among the surrounding hills. So Miffins decided to go. He wanted, too, a chance at the partridges in the woods north of Barnet Lake. They would readily come out of cover after such an enforced fast.

He harnessed Nap into the light farm-wagon, and, putting in shawls and an extra buffalo-robe and horse blanket, that Martha might ride more comfortably, a good lunch, a game bag, an extra halter, an extra hitching-strap, and Anstey's small shot-gun, he climbed in; but just as he was driving out of the yard he remembered the lantern. With hard going they could not get home before dark. He turned back, and, not daring to leave Nap, tied him to the hitching-post, filled the lantern, and put some matches in his pocket. Then he started again.

As he drove along the high road that skirted the slopes just above Beaver Dam, he heard the tremendous roar of the Branch as it plunged downward toward Hurdyville.



"I'd like to see the water go over that dam now," he thought.

Jacob had told him that although it was not made by hands, and was called a natural dam, it had been at first, in his boyhood, before the outlet to Barnet Lake was dammed for saw-mill purposes, a resort for beavers, and they had laid the foundations for the higher dam that had been formed in times of freshet, when large trunks of trees, earth, clay, rocks, and stones had been carried down the Branch, and caught and lodged on the obstruction placed there by the beavers. Jacob had also said that those who had watched its formation during all these years, had never fully trusted its strength. He said, also, that he felt sure the boom of logs that the lumbermen had made there the last five springs had weakened it.

"It'll last mebbe a hundred years, 'n' mebbe it won't," he had said. "'Twouldn't s'prise me ter see it er sailin' down-stream in my lifetime. It'll wet 'em a leetle in the village — the stock'll do some lively swimmin' in the yards, but 'twon't put no lives in danger. But ef ever the lake dam should break, God hev mercy on 'em all! It's allus ben a worrit ter me, 'n' the town's shifless 'bout lookin' arter it now the saw-mill's gone."

Miffins recalled this speech of Jacob's, as the



roar of the Branch followed him along the high-road. The stage-road to Handy's tavern followed the high bank of the Branch for six miles. At that point it rounded Barnet Lake, and turned into the woods to the north; six miles farther took the traveller over the mountain and left him at Handy's tavern and a small settlement of houses, which was twelve miles from Stillton, a little village where lived Silas Foss, Jacob's second cousin.

Miffins had heard of the hunter's paradise in the woods to the north of the lake, and anticipated bagging plenty of small game — partridges, gray squirrels, possibly a fox, for the skin of which he would receive a bounty.

It was still dark and lowering when he reached the tavern at one. He put up the horse, ordered some coffee, ate his lunch, and then went into the woods and low bush. Game was, indeed, plentiful, and he longed for Anstey to share the sport. Five brace of fat partridges, two squirrels, and a rabbit nearly filled his bag.

Excited with his luck, the time passed more quickly than he realized; it was a little past four when he returned to the tavern. But no Jacob and Martha were there. Upon inquiry, he found that the stage which had passed through there at ten had brought no passengers.

Miffins hardly knew what to think. Perhaps



Silas Foss was worse; perhaps they had concluded to wait and return on the morning stage to Hurdyville; the roads were pretty bad. Perhaps — and this seemed to him most likely — it was still raining in Stillton, and they had concluded it was raining in Hurdyville, and Miffins had obeyed orders.

He inquired of the landlord if the stage-driver had said anything about the weather.

“Wal, he didn’t say much — but he wrung out the legs of his pants by the kitchen fire, ’n’ said it beat the deluge. I never see the Branch so high — it rises jest over there,” pointing beyond the summit of the mountain, “’n’ it’s nothin’ but er brook when ’tain’t dropping pitchforks, ez it hez fer three days.”

Miffins decided to wait until five or half-past, and then, if Jacob and Martha did not appear, to drive homeward. He would be only an hour late for the chores, and he had the lantern with him.

“Ef I wuz yew, I’d git thet lantern fixed onter the axle ’fore yer started. Thet colt’s er feelin’ purty kinky — er high-life one ez ever I see. Yer don’t see sech horseflesh on the mountin more’n once er lifetime.”

Miffins took his advice, lighted his lantern, and hung it from the axle before he started.

“Guess yer know yer critter purty well,”



drawled the man, as Miffins calmed Nap with a word, and the horse stood motionless for Miffins to climb in.

"We're pretty good friends," said Miffins, and drove away toward the woods in the quickly gathering gloom.

It was dark and lonely enough for those six miles of wilderness road. He met no team. Now and then a rustling in the underbrush, a thud of little paws over the dead, soaked leaves. Once Nap reared high, as a lightning-blasted tree trunk showed white in the lantern's rays, and once he shied at a wood-pussy loping across the road.

As they emerged from the woods, the moon, three-quarters to the full at that date, was struggling with masses of scudding blackness. Through rifts, here and there, its light shone brilliantly white for a moment, then it was covered as with a pall.

As Miffins rounded the lake toward the old saw-mill, long since fallen into disuse, that stood on the bank at the end of the dam, the sky cleared and the moon shone full upon the beautiful sheet of water. Miffins drew rein. This was something worth seeing.

The waters of the lake produced a curious optical delusion, or so he thought at the moment. It seemed over full, and the surface all around the banks rose into a perceptible oval, while near



the centre and toward the dam there seemed to be a depression, as if some huge weight were pressing the central waters into a trough where the Branch issued from the lake and went over the dam.

Miffins rubbed his eyes. Then he looked again. It was really so. What did it all mean? He drove as near as he could to the bank, and again drew rein. He must find out what this thing meant, so far as he could.

He tied Nap with double hitching-straps to a tree near by the roofless saw-mill, and, taking the lantern from the axle, made his way along the rotted beams and decayed flooring to the sluiceway, unused now for many years. He crept along the beams a little way, and then could go no farther. The moon still shone clear and bright. The water looked like quicksilver. Now he could see that strange depression at first-hand, and, as he looked, Jacob's words came back to him: "But if ever the lake dam should break, God hev mercy on 'em all!"

This, then, was the matter! The lake dam was giving way! Would it go while he stood there and carry death to all the dwellers in Hurdyville? The boy turned faint and sick with the shock. He leaned heavily on his crutch. At that moment Nap whinnied. The sound flashed a possibility into his mind and steadied his nerves.



Cautiously he made his way back over the sunken beams and the unsteady flooring.

He would try it, let come what would. He could but make the attempt to save them.

The moon was still out, but black clouds were driving up from the south.

The boy talked quietly to Nap while he took off the harness. The horse rubbed his nose on the boy's shoulder while he was at work. He took the horse blanket, folded it, and with girth and halter and hitching-straps, managed to secure it so that it did not slip on the horse's back.

He could take neither lantern nor crutch; it would be all he could do to stick on, for he had never been able to ride a horse on account of his twisted thigh, and the pain it caused his shrunken leg. But to-night it *must* be.

The reins he shortened to use for a bridle. He took care, too, to fold the blanket in such a way that there were loops into which he could thrust at least his good foot, the right. He climbed into the wagon and mounted Nap, talking to him all the while.

All the noble animal's blood and training showed in the wonderfully intelligent way in which he handled himself in the unwonted circumstances.

He aided Miffins to the extent of his ability. The horse felt that there was work before him,



and something helpless on his back. He laid back his ears, turned his head toward Miffins, backed gently away from the tree, then, with a snort, waited for orders.

Miffins patted his neck, then with an end of the hitching-strap struck the horse sharply on the flank. "Hoop-la, Nap," he cried in his ear. Without rearing or plunging, the horse set himself into a rapid canter. Not once did he trot.

Miffins leaned far forward upon the horse's neck, his right foot braced as firmly as possible in the blanket fold, his left leg lying as far as possible on the horse's flank, for ease of his misery, and knowing that soon he must sit upright.

Now speed, Nap! nor strain those noble withers in the first three miles. There is stiff work before you on the lower road; there is a break-neck pace for the last mile; two hundred lives are at stake in the village on the flats, and the horseman Death, mounted on his foaming charger, has already begun the race and will soon ride neck to neck with you!

The horse sped onward, ever down-hill. The moon was again obscured by clouds, but the fleet hoofs struck out sparks along the road, — nor ever a stumble, nor ever a faltering.

Miffins set his teeth. The pain, even with that cradle-gait, was becoming intolerable. Had the dam given way? He fancied he heard an added



roaring to the waters of the Branch below the embankment along which the highroad ran. He strained his ears — it was no fancy. By the lesser grade, he knew he must be near the hill road that led to the Roost, consequently somewhere near Beaver Dam. If that dam would only hold for a little under the on-rush of the lake waters, he might still be in time.

“Nap, Nap!” he cried, in the horse’s ear. “On, on, good fellow, on!” He let forth the full power of his lungs, trained for years to sound above the din and roar of the thoroughfares of New York.

The horse responded at once to that urgent cry. With ears flattened to his mane and head low, he broke into a run, a furious pace, in which there was consciousness of nothing on the part of horse or rider, but the strain of every nerve and muscle in the animal organism, whether human or equine.

The sweat dropped from Miffins’s forehead into his eyes, blinding them. The sweat stood in beads upon his racked body. The last mile! Horse and rider were deaf to any exterior sound — the pounding of their own blood was all they heard.

Here and there a dweller on a hill farm, hearing the thud of the flying hoofs on the highroad — a sound that passed in a moment — opened the farmhouse door and looked out into the night.



At last, a village light! Miffins, clinging desperately to the horse's mane, but sitting as erect as possible, opened his lips, and from his throat, parched with suffering and excitement, came that awful cry that resounded far and wide:

"The lake — dam's — broke! Fly — fly!"

The dwellers in Hurdyville were either eating their supper or clearing the tables and finishing the chores, when that first warning cry reached them.

Squire Liscom's house was the last in the village, toward the east, and Dan, barring the barn door for the night, heard that cry and the oncoming steed. He rushed to the road with his lantern held high above his head.

Something flashed into the light of its rays, and a stentorian voice — hoarse — powerful — far-reaching, cried:

"The lake — dam's — broke! Fly — fly!" and the something was gone in the darkness.

"Ho! ho! The lake — dam's — broke!" resounded through the night — and men and women and children, hearing that terrible cry, rushed to the doors only to see the something pass, and hear the fearful note:

"Ho! ho! The lake — dam's — broke!"

No need for that further warning of the dull roar approaching from the east! In terror for their lives the two hundred souls in Hurdyville



village fled from their homes through the waters that were already rising in their dooryards — fled to the security of the hill-slopes behind their houses, and waited trembling as to what would be the outcome of that engulfing flood.

When, at last, about eight o'clock, the moon shone clear, a waste of waters covered the fertile meadows and the one long street of Hurdyville village. Here and there floated the wreck of a barn, an outhouse, or corn-crib, that had been struck and pressed from its foundations by trunks of trees and beams piling against it.

The houses, save a few back on the hillsides, the refuge of the villagers, were filled with water to the second story, and cattle and sheep in the pens and yards, and horses in the barns had been drowned by the dozen. The fury of the flood had been spent when it vented itself upon the lowlands, and the East Branch rolled on to its junction with the Winooski at Barnet, giving no hint, save in the floating wreckage, and here and there the carcass of a sheep or cow, and its bed full to overflowing, of the devastation it had wrought in one hour.

With the roar of the on-coming waters in his ears, Miffins, spent to exhaustion, sped on. He dared not stop. "To Barnet!" was his thought, "for help." But the horse that had covered the six miles in eighteen minutes was



spent, too. A mile beyond the village he slackened his terrible pace, and gradually fell into a walk, breathing heavily. At last he stopped of his own accord.

The stage from Barnet — late on account of the trains — was coming along the road with no hint of what was before it. John Anstey had returned a day sooner than he had anticipated, and sat on the seat with the driver. There were no other passengers. He saw the horse — apparently riderless — stop in the middle of the road. The driver reined in his horses.

“It’s Nap!” exclaimed Anstey. He sprang to the ground. The horse whinnied feebly, but never stirred. The man stooped and lifted almost from under the animal’s hind feet a limp, and to all appearances, unconscious figure.

“Miffins!” he cried. “Miffins, speak to me!” The boy’s eyes opened. With great effort, he raised his head, and shouted hoarsely:

“The lake — dam’s — broke!” and knew no more.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### *The Little Citizen*

FOR weeks, nothing was talked of in every village in the county but the Hurdyville freshet. For weeks, Miffins's name was upon the lips of old and young, and for weeks, the boy, who had risked life and limb for the lives of others, lay unconscious of all the praise and gratitude in Anstey's den in the Roost.

It was brain fever, the result of that terrible ride under the pressure of life and death. Again and again the loving watchers through the long November nights heard the hoarse cry break from the lips of the fever-stricken boy — "The lake — dam's — broke!" And in his delirium there were constant incoherent mutterings of waters and floods and waves that were overwhelming him. But the waters subsided at last, and those who loved him, and those who owed to him their lives, welcomed with tears of thankfulness the joyful word that Miffins, too, was saved.



Anstey carried him, weak and pale, out into the kitchen for the Thanksgiving dinner.

"Yer've got ter eat now, sonny, 'n' make up for the starvation diet we've kept yer on these last four weeks," said Jacob, trying to speak cheerfully, but finding that his voice broke most uncertainly. "I ain't er goin' ter show my boy to all my townsfolks er lookin' ez ef we'd kept him short! I told 'em they'd hev ter wait er spell 'fore they see yer in public!"

There had been held in the town-hall of Barnet, two weeks after the freshet, a meeting of the inhabitants of both villages. That it concerned Miffins, Jacob knew through John Anstey, who had been asked by a committee of five, representing the two towns, to meet the townspeople that night. But of the proceedings he knew nothing, and his last remark was directed to Anstey to see what it would bring forth in response.

Anstey smiled, but did not gratify him. "Have you decided on the name yet, Mr. Foss?" he asked.

"Yes, Marthy 'n' me hev talked it over with sonny, 'n' he's goin' ter be called Foss, anyway, seein' I'm er goin' ter make it legal, 'n' Marthy she wants him ter hev the name of our boy, thet's James, 'n' sonny wants your'n, if you're willin' he should hev it."



"I should be proud to have you bear my name, Miffins. So then, it's to be James Anstey Foss. I think we'll have to introduce him to the townspeople by that name."

When he was able to be driven out, he was duly christened James Anstey Foss by Parson Leonard on a quiet Sunday morning before church, and the next week he was invited, by formal invitation through a committee, to meet the inhabitants of both villages in the town-hall of Barnet.

Jacob was a proud man as he drove Martha and Anstey and Miffins down to Barnet one frosty night in December. He had harnessed Ethan and Nap together, for Nap, too, had been invited.

As Miffins stumped into the hall, brilliantly lighted by dozens of kerosene lamps, decorated with flags and Christmas greens, and with scarce standing-room for the many, the village band struck up, "Hail to the Chief." The people rose as one to their feet and fairly drowned the triumphal strains with their cheers.

Miffins was escorted to a seat on the small platform by Seth and Jim and Harry and Billy, who were acting as ushers. Jacob, Martha, and Anstey also were guests of honor.

Lawyer Slocum was chairman. He had to



rap several times before there was silence. When at last he procured it, he spoke:

“Parson Leonard, will you offer prayer?” As the parson stepped forward and lifted his hand, every head was bowed. No one who heard that short petition ever forgot it. It brought each one into communion, for the space of a minute, with the Father of us all. Then Lawyer Slocum spoke:

“Friends and neighbors: we are gathered here to-night to try to express in some way, inadequate as it must seem to us all, our gratitude to one who, coming among us as a stranger nearly a year and a half ago, has rendered to all the people of our town a service that rarely falls to the lot of any man to render to one, or two at most, of his fellow men. We, two hundred souls, owe to him our lives. No words can express what is in the heart of each of us to-night. No recognition can be made in the remotest degree adequate to the service rendered. In rendering that service, he counted his own young life as nothing. Thank God, that life has been spared to him and to us. The meeting is open to one and all for two-minute testimonies of gratefulness and thankfulness.”

Lawyer Slocum sat down and cleared his throat, as did likewise many another in the



audience. Deacon Simms rose and made his way to the little platform.

"Deacon Simms has the floor," said Lawyer Slocum.

"I hain't got much ter say, Mr. Chairman; words don't come easy at jest sech er time, but if I've took the sense of this meetin' of my feller townsfolks, it is ter try ter *dew* somethin' ter show how we feel 'bout this ere boy. I've done er good deal er canvassin' sence thet night, seven weeks ago, when I see my cows er swimmin' fer dear life, 'n' me 'n' Seth 'n' Jane ready ter swim too, in ernother minute, ef things hedn't worked jest ez they did, 'n' I want ter make er motion."

"I'll second any motion yer er min' ter make, deacon," piped Barzy.

"I move thet ez many of us taxpayers ez want ter show our appreciation of what this ere boy's done fer us will show it by puttin' their han's in their pockets, 'n' signify the same by risin' ter their feet!"

Barzy's "Second the motion" was drowned in an outburst of cheering.

"I hain't got ready yit ter hev it put ter vote, Mr. Chairman, coz I don't know jest how ter open the wallet. I'm open to suggestion."

Barzy rose. Lawyer Slocum called to order. "Mr. Putnam has the floor."

"I move, Mr. Chairman," piped Barzy, "thet



the taxpayers er this town er ours, pay er poll-tax of fifty cents on er year, fer every year er their lives they calc'late this boy's ben the means er savin' em, — settin' the Scriptor bounds er life ez three score and ten year, — till he's of age. Thet means fer me fifteen year, 'n' seven dollars 'n' a half tax each year, — 'n' thet pro rata sum from ez many taxpayers ez is willin', be put out ter int'rest, 'n' the amount applied ter this boy's eddication; fer yer all know he's got ter live by his brains, 'n' live up ter the glory er thet night's work, 'n' we ain't er goin' ter let no outsiders claim what's our privilege."

"Vote! vote!" shouted the people. Put to vote, not by ayes and nays, but by standing and counting, be it recorded to the honor of Hurdyville that every taxpayer — even Jane Slocum Liscom — sprang to his feet, proud to be counted in. Again there was an uproar of cheers.

"May I speak, father?" whispered Billy. For answer his father announced: "William Slocum has the floor." Billy stood up like a man.

"I just want to say that whatever college Miffins goes to, is going to be the college for all us fellows of the Hurdyville school that can get there." He turned to Miffins. "We haven't any choice of colors, Miffins, but yours, whether



it's the blue" — here Billy made a fine bow to Anstey, and the whole school interrupted with clapping and shouting, and startled the rest of the audience with the true Yale yell. Anstey rose in acknowledgment — "or," continued Billy, when he could be heard, "the crimson, or the black and the orange, or the blue and the white. We're going to wear the colors you wear, and swear by them, and die by them."

Billy sat down amid wild applause, waving of handkerchiefs, and the strains of the village band attempting in a rather wheezy manner, "Hail Columbia, happy land!"

Reuben Liscom rose. "Come forward, Mr. Liscom; silence, silence. Mr. Liscom has the floor." The chairman rapped sharply.

"I have but a few words to say, Mr. Chairman. I know the city from which this boy comes. My brother and I were in Columbia together, and so, for four years, I knew its streets, and, in part, its life. I know, as a man knows, its awful temptations, the many byways as well as highroads to ruin — and sometimes I have wondered if any good thing could come out of it. But my doubts are dispelled and my faith strengthened, as I stand here to-night and look upon this boy, a waif of those streets, entering into a manhood that promises so much.

"My friends and neighbors, it is, as you know,



the custom in great cities to confer upon a distinguished guest the freedom of the city, — in a sense, the honor of citizenship.” He turned to Miffins. “We have, after consultation, determined to present you with this memorial of our love and gratitude, and ask you to accept, as James Anstey Foss, the freedom of the two villages of Barnet and Hurdyville, and do us the honor of looking upon yourself henceforth as the Little Citizen.”

Reuben Liscom handed Miffins a roll, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and sat down.

The audience lost their heads. “Speech! speech! — Miffins — James Anstey Foss — ’rah! ’rah! ’rah! — three cheers for the Little Citizen!”

Martha had to be led from the platform, and poor Miffins looked appealingly, first at Anstey, then at Jacob. Jacob rose, and when silence was restored, cleared his throat.

“’Tain’t no use, I’ve got ter speak fer him ter-night, neighbors — ’n’ I thank ye kindly fer all ye’ve said ’n’ done; it’s ben done ter me through my boy, James Anstey Foss.” — Cheers, prolonged cheers. — “I’d hoped onct” — there was a sob; it was Martha — “we might er hed our own, but ez thet couldn’t be, our hearts air full of gratefulness fer what we hev. ’Twuz my



wife's 'speriment — not mine — 'n' she's the one ter thank fer tryin' it."

Such cheers as went up for Martha Foss! They outdid in heartiness and vigor, if that were possible, all the others.

Jim and Harry, Billy and Seth, and the rest of the school's masculine contingent had disappeared, and as the meeting broke up, shouts and the band were heard outside.

To Jacob's amazement, the horses had been taken from the wagon, the wagon itself trimmed with flags and greens, and decorated with Chinese lanterns strung on wires that had been wound with ground pine, and attached to four laths nailed in the four corners. All the boys were ranged, half and half, on each side of the pole, with stout ropes for traces. Nap was draped with a large flag, and his neck wreathed with everlasting. Anstey led him.

Martha, Jacob, and Miffins were helped into the gay-looking equipage — the worthy couple protesting against "sech doin's." The band led the way. The wagon followed, drawn by the boys, and behind it, meek, yet proud beneath his honors, paced Nap, with Anstey at his bridle.

The villagers, men, women, and children, accompanied the procession, cheering, singing, and shouting. The band wheezed and clanged.



Under the inspiring strains of the "Star Spangled Banner," Nap waltzed first on one side of the road, then on the other. Thus the waif of the streets of New York, who had travelled that road for the first time eighteen months before, was borne homeward toward the Roost — an acknowledged "Little Citizen."

THE END.











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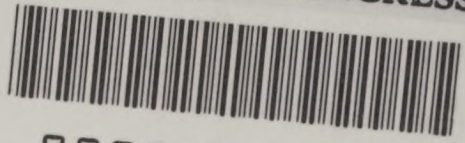
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